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## History of Martial Arts in Iceland and their Image in Media

**Author: Jóhann Ingi Bjarnason**

Final Project in School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Lokaverkefni við Hug- og Félagsvísindasvið



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## History of Martial Arts in Iceland and their Image in Media

**Supervisor: Markus Meckl**

Final Project for 180 ETCS credit B.A.-degree in School of Humanities and Social Sciences

Lokaverkefni til 180 ETCS eininga B.A.-prófs við Hug- og Félagsvísindasvið

I hereby declare that this final-project is all my own work,  
except as indicated in the text

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Jóhann Ingi Bjarnason

I hereby declare that this final-project satisfies, in my opinion, requirements for B.A-degree

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Markus Meckl

## Abstract

Numerous martial arts are practiced in Iceland. One of the oldest sports in Iceland, as well as the oldest martial art, is glíma. Glíma served many purposes in ancient times but in present time the sport has diminished greatly in Iceland. Boxing was introduced to Iceland early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There has always been some controversy around the sport of boxing and it reached a peak in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when boxing was banned for nearly 50 years in Iceland. After the legislation against boxing the art of judo grew considerably in Iceland and only a decade later karate was introduced to Iceland. Many practitioners in judo and karate in Iceland seem to embrace the oriental ideology that follows these sports and thus there has not been as much criticism towards them as was against boxing. Despite that Taekwondo and mixed martial arts are both relatively new sports in Iceland both sports have considerably more people practicing them than Icelandic glíma.

## Útdráttur

Það eru margar mismunandi bardagaíþróttir á Íslandi. Ein elsta íþrótt sem stunduð hefur verið á Íslandi og jafnframt elsta bardagaíþróttin er íslenska glíman. Á öldum áður þjónaði glíman ýmsum hlutverkum fyrir Íslendinga en notagildi hennar og vinsældir hafa minnkað mikið í dag. Hnefaleikar voru kynntir Íslendingum í byrjun 20. aldarinnar. Frá byrjun hnefaleikaíþróttarinnar á Íslandi hefur verið mikill ágreiningur um hana, þessi ágreiningur náði hámarki á miðri síðustu öld þegar hnefaleikar voru bannaðir með lögum í tæp 50 ár. Eftir að íþróttin var bönnuð með lögum þá færðu margir hnefaleikaiðkendur sig yfir í judo, um áratug síðar ruddi karate sér svo til rúms á Íslandi. Margir iðkendur karate og judo virðast taka við þeirri austurlensku hugmyndafræði sem írþróttirnar hafa í för með sér með opnum örmum og gæti það verið ástæða þess að þær hafi ekki setið jafn harðri gagnrýni og hnefaleikarnir á Íslandi. Taekwondo og blandaðar bardagaíþróttir (MMA) eru báðar ungar íþróttir á Íslandi en þrátt fyrir það eru þær báðar með talsvert fleiri iðkendur en íslenska glíman.

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## **Introduction**

Since dawn of mankind, humans have had to struggle for their survival. In order to evolve and become the species we are today, we had to hunt animals for food and defend ourselves from bigger predators. The most effective way for the weaponless prehistoric man to defend himself and attack was by seizing, grasping, off-balancing, tripping, choking, striking and throwing the opponent. This basically describes the modern art of mixed martial arts.

Wrestling is mankind's oldest and most essential sport. It evolved from the natural human attack and defense response, fight or flight, through the millenniums it has evolved alongside us and turned into a sport practiced for entertainment. Wrestling, running, archery, javelin throw are all sports that have come to existence due to man's struggle for survival.

Martial arts are a relatively young phenomena in Iceland, except for the art of glíma. In this BA-thesis the Icelandic history of most martial arts that exist in Iceland will be studied as well as inspecting their image in Icelandic media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.



## Chapter 1 - Glíma

### 1.1 Origins of Glíma

The national sport in Iceland, glíma (Icelandic wrestling), has been a part of the Icelandic nation since the commonwealth age (930-1262 A.D.). Its history spans over eleven centuries or since settlement began in Iceland. The first prevailing wave of settlers in Iceland came from Scandinavia in ca. 860-870, by ca. 930 all suitable land in Iceland is believed to have been occupied (M. Bennett Nichols, 1999; Jones, 1988).

From the Icelandic Sagas, as well as from other sources, we know that there once existed different wrestling styles in Iceland, there even existed a game of wrestling which was done in water (M. Bennett Nichols, 1999), these different styles arrived to Iceland with the first settlers. The settlers of Iceland came mostly from Norway and brought with them slaves primarily from Ireland and the British Isles. The Icelandic culture originated from a mixture of Scandinavian culture and Celtic culture, the same can be said about glíma. The Norwegian settlers and the Celtic settlers brought their own form of wrestling to Iceland, a form of traditional folk-style wrestling from their native countries. The settlers also brought with them language, religion, law, farming methods, animal domesticates, games, sports and bathing customs, Saturday is still known as “Laugardagur,” the bathing-day (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999).

Various ancient forms of wrestling have been preserved by nations throughout the world. *Schwingen* in Switzerland, *Ssireum* in Korea, *Sumo* in Japan, *Karakusak* in Turkey, are all examples of old style wrestling. Ancient wrestling styles can also be found in various parts of the British Isles, e.g. *backhold* in Scotland and in Westmoreland/Cumberland and in Cornwall and Devon there are styles that bear the regions name. Other well known ancient styles are *Gouren* in France, *Lucha canaria* in the Canary Islands. There are also old wrestling styles to be found among the nomadic shepherds of Mongolia, the Maoris in New Zealand, the Indians of the Amazon region etc. (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

The modern styles of wrestling such as the *Greco-Roman* style or *freestyle* have little in common with these folkloric styles. The same applies to the Japanese *Judo* and the Russian *Sambo*, which where both modernized as a form of competition wrestling in the last century,

being derived from ancient national styles formerly used in warfare and self-defense (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988; Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

Two authors, Guy Jaouen and Henri Boen, of the Federation of Gouren (FALSAB), suggest in their book; *Gouren: Breton and Celtic Wrestling, a single-source theory for glíma in Iceland*.

The authors state that:

Brittany is the land where British tribes migrated under the pressure of the Saxon conquerors, in the 5<sup>th</sup> century. Glíma, the modern Icelandic style of wrestling also stems from the same root. It is said to have been taken there by Irish slaves, deported by the Vikings in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries. Like all the Celtic styles, Glíma is a courteous type of wrestling performed in a standing position with the opponents shaking hands before each bout. It is still held in great favour by the Icelandic audience who watch the most important contests on the national television programmes (Jaouen, G & Henri Boen, 1985: p. 4).

This single-source theory of wrestling in Iceland does not seem plausible, even though there are probably numerous elements from the Celtic culture that were brought to Iceland by the Celtic slaves. The main error in this theory is the oversight of the possibility that the Scandinavian Vikings may have had their own style of wrestling. The most probable explanation for the origin of Glíma is a coalition of the two different wrestling styles, i.e. the Scandinavian style and the Celtic style (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

## **1.2 What is Glíma**

Wrestling in its most extensive sense is any match between two unarmed persons, where they grab each other and try to submit or trip one another (Björn Bjarnason, 1950). In Iceland wrestling developed to serve a threefold purpose. Firstly in warfare; when a warrior lost his weapon in combat he could resort to his wrestling skills, either for attack or defense. Secondly in daily life; used to restore warmth and circulation to the body after a long time out in the cold or during inactive periods at fishing station or when resting during long shifts of tending and herding sheep in remote regions. Thirdly for pleasure, play and competition; wherever

people gathered, at schools, at churches etc. and at any festive occasion (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988).

Through the passing of time, many nations have developed some form of traditional wrestling. On the contrary from forms of hand-to-hand combat which were designed for warfare to hurt or kill an opponent, these traditional forms of wrestling were intended for entertainment, pleasure and play. Glíma belongs to this latter category (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988).

Around the year 1200 Snorri Sturluson, in his book *Snorra-Edda*, describes a wrestling match between the Norse god *Þór* and *Elli* (or Old age), in his description Snorri mentions *manoeuvres* and *to fall onto one knee* (Björn Bjarnason, 1950). Besides the account on wrestling in *Snorra-Edda* there are accounts on wrestling/fang in eleven other Icelandic Sagas, incl. *Gunnlaugs saga ormstungu*, *Grettis saga*, *Víga-Glúms saga* and more (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

In *Egils saga*, believed to be written approx. 1220-1240, the words *glímur* are mentioned for the first time and in plural, though there are no specifics on what kind of sports they represent (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006). Before *Egils saga*, wrestling is only mentioned by the name *fang* or *fangbrögð* in written sources. *Fang* is an Icelandic idiom which means “catching” in the sense of obtaining control or possession of something e.g. catching a fish. *Fang* is also the Icelandic word for the area of the body between one’s arms. A man who is in another’s “fang” is held between his arms (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988).

The words *glímur*, as well as the noun *glíma* and the verb *að glíma*, also appears in *Finnboga saga* (believed to be written in early 13<sup>th</sup> century), and clearly refers to *brókartök* (e. trouser-hold primitive glíma). The name *glíma* is believed to have conjured by the clergy in the 11<sup>th</sup> century in order to eradicate the remains of the heathen customs. At that time there were already schools operating at the episcopal sees (Hólar and Skálholt), where wrestling was practiced by its students. Most styles of *fang* were a form of martial arts, used to maim or kill and thus considered evil. One might presume that those styles of *fang* were frowned upon by the bishopric but the students wrestling had altered into a gleeful and touching play. To distinguish it from other forms of wrestling it got the name *glíma*, which most likely derived from the word *glý*, i.e. gladness (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

However there existed several styles or genres of wrestling in Iceland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. All of these styles belong to the category *fang* although the forms of them aimed at recreation, joy or competition were, according to a paragraph in the law-book *Jónsbók* which was adopted in 1281 by Althingi, defined as *leikfang*. *Leikur* is the Icelandic word for game and *fang* the word for wrestling (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988), in modern translation *leikfang* would be a toy or a plaything. The known styles in Iceland include; *lausatök* (loose-grips), *hryggspenna* (back-spanning), *axlatök* (shoulder-grips) and *brókartök* (trouser-grips). It was this style *brókartök* that received the name *glíma* sometime before the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

*Lausatök* was a liberal form of wrestling where all grips were permitted. Tricks were applied with the feet, hands and all other parts of the body. Various hand-grips, at least 27 of them, were also permitted. The contestant who remained on his feet won, if both of them fell, the one who was quicker up again was the winner. In cold weather, especially when clothing was damp due to rain or snow, *lausatök* was well suited for play and the preservation of warmth. *Lausatök* was widely practiced in Iceland and in some areas they were even more common than *glíma* (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988).

*Hryggspenna* is a wrestling style that relies on brute strength, there are no throws, swings or any maneuvers which off-balance the opponent allowed. The wrestlers clasp their hands behind the others back and they then try to sway the opponent back until he falls.

*Hryggspenna* is a contest of strength not of skillful techniques and agility (Björn Bjarnason, 1950; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999).

*Brókartök* is a form of wrestling where the contestants applied all tricks with firm grips on each other's trousers. It is from this style of wrestling that modern *glíma* is believed to have descended. A small statue carved in wood, believed to be from the 11<sup>th</sup> century, now housed in a museum in Lillehammer, Norway, shows two men in trouser-grip wrestling similar to the Icelandic *glíma*, the only difference is that they both have their left foot slightly forward whereas in *glíma* your right foot should be slightly forward (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999). That indicates that this type of wrestling must have been common in the Scandinavian area at the time.

*Axlatök* is a wrestling style that resembles Scottish back-hold. The wrestlers stood chest to chest overlooking each other's right shoulder. They clasped their hands high on each other's

backs, with no other hand-grips or any hand-tricks allowed. Swinging was allowed as well as all other glíma tricks (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988).

Glíma is the only sport that originates from Iceland. The uniqueness of glíma is equivalent to the nation's language, history or literature. All of these things are an essential part of the Icelandic legacy. In the national curriculum for elementary schools in Iceland 2007:11 it says: "The national sport in Iceland, glíma, needs to hold its place in the elementary school physical education. Wrestling has been practiced in Iceland as long as man can remember and it is thus important to withhold this great cultural heritage".

The Icelandic glíma is Iceland's national sport. Glíma is a unique genre of wrestling where two wrestlers compete for victory by tripping their opponent. *Bylta* (e. tumble or fall, is the same as defeat in glíma) occurs if either wrestler touches any body part above knee or elbow to the ground or by placing both hands simultaneously behind his back (Kjartan Guðjónsson, 1993). The features of glíma which distinguish it from other wrestling forms include: 1) Upright, erect posture of the contestants. 2) *Stígandi* (e. glíma-steps, clockwise circular stepping), the circular movement of the wrestlers between the application, and attempted application, of tricks. It is believed that *stígandi* originated to allow maximum use of the limited indoor space in which to wrestle. Because of the harsh weather conditions in Iceland, men sometimes had no other choice but to wrestle indoors. 3) Fixed grips on the opponent's *glímubelti* (e. wrestling-belt). 4) Distinctive techniques by applying tricks only using feet, legs or hips. 5) There are no hand techniques allowed other than jerking, swinging, lifting or off balancing, always with the grips firmly on the *glímubelti*. 6) It is not allowed to wrestle on the ground (i.e. no mat-work) (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999).

The beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was an era of modernization for glíma, it transformed from a traditional past-time to an organized sport. Rules and laws concerning the sport were written, formal judges and referees were introduced and there were wrestling clubs established, such as Ármann (1888) and Grettir (1906) (M. Bennett Nichols, 1999; Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006). In the years 1905-1908 there was an official adaptation of an invention named *glímubelti* (e. wrestling-belt) which replaced the traditional trouser-grip in competition wrestling. The *glímubelti* was initially only a leather strap around the wrestler's right thigh, it has undergone several modifications since then. In modern glíma the belt is a large leather belt that encircles the waist and from it extends two smaller belts that strap around each thigh,

resembling a harness (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999). The rules on how to hold the *glímubelti* in a match are the same today as they were almost a hundred years ago, according to the Icelandic glímulög (glíma-laws) the wrestlers take grip with their right hand on their opponents left hip and their left hand on their opponents right thigh (Glímulög, nr. 16.3/2008).

The glíma-club *Grettir* had an engraved silver belt made in 1906 (referred to as the *Grettisbelti*, named after the legendary 11<sup>th</sup> century Icelandic wrestler Grettir) and that same year a competition named “the Icelandic Glíma Championship” was established, awarding the winner the *Grettisbelti* and the title of “Iceland’s Glíma Champion”. This is the oldest prize still being contested for in Iceland. In 1914 females were allowed to practice glíma for a short period of time, resuming limited practices in the 1970’s, it was not until 1988 that females began to formally practice and compete in the sport. Mixed gender competition is forbidden by the rules of *Glímusamband Íslands* (GLÍ e. Iceland’s Federation of Glíma), but females compete for the title of “Glíma Champion” as well and the winners receives the *Freyjumen* (a golden chain named after the Norse goddess Freyja) (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999). The Icelandic Glíma Championship is still held in Iceland every year for both male and female competitors.

In 1916 the Icelandic Sports Federation constructed rules applying competition in glíma. The rules dictated that a glíma match should start from a standstill and that a combatant would lose if any part of the body above knee or elbow would touch the ground. These rules were abolished in 1951 and new rules that conformed to traditional wrestling laws laid down (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988).

In glíma the two wrestlers shake hands before taking grips on the *glímubelti*, the hand shake is a gesture of mutual respect and is commonly known as *glímukveðja*. Once the wrestlers have positioned themselves in the correct stance (right foot slightly forward and looking over the opponents right shoulder) and have taken the correct grips, the referee signals and says; “Stígið !” this indicates that the match has begun. The main objective in glíma is to off-balance the opponent and throwing him to the ground. This is done by using a swing, jerk, lift or pull with the hands secured on the *glímubelti* and then applying a foot, leg or hip technique and swiftly, but gracefully, throw the opponent to the floor. It is forbidden to fall on top of your opponent, or following him to the ground, a wrestler should maintain balance and step

over his opponent (Helgi Kjartansson, 2002; M. Bennett Nichols, 1999). A wrestler loses if he falls to the floor in a certain way, termed as *bylta*. If both wrestlers fall to the ground it is called *bræðrabylta* (e. brother's-fall) and no points are given and the match continues (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006).

Glíma has served the Icelandic nation since its founding in the commonwealth age and has always been adopted into the conditions of Icelandic society. Though numerous styles of wrestling have persisted in Iceland, only one lives a blossoming life today, glíman. A traditional ancient form of competition glíma, named *bændaglíma*, helped evolve glímu into the sport it is today. *Bændaglíma* dates as long back as the commonwealth age, at large gatherings the participants were divided into two groups which formed opposing lines. One member in each group was nominated the leader or *bóndi*, hence the name *bændaglíma*. *Bændurnir* sent forth their wrestlers, and the looser in each match was disqualified, until either team had lost all its members (Helgi Kjartansson, 2002; Þorsteinn Einarsson, 1988). In 2009 *ISI* (National Olympic- and Sports Association of Iceland) published a statistics report which showed that there were 393 people practicing glíma in Iceland, most of them in southern Iceland (Rúna H. Hilmarisdóttir, 2009).

### **1.3 The story of Jóhannes Jósefsson**

Jóhannes Jósefsson was born in Akureyri 1883. He was always a go-getter and energetic growing up in the part of Akureyri named Oddeyri. He was introduced to glíma at Möðruvellir around the turn of the century where he worked as a stable boy. When he returned back to Akureyri he turned every brawl he had into a glíma match (Stefán Jónsson, 1964). In the years 1904-1905 he stayed in Norway and there he got acquainted with the work of youth associations. Upon his return to Iceland Jóhannes was consumed by glíma and everything that concerned the sport. He and some of his friends were the innovators in using the *glímubelti* and he said in his memoirs that they were mainly constructed to save their outfits from tearing in the tussle that came with glíma. Jóhannes also said in his memoirs that in later years he had regretted ever introducing *glímubelti* to the art of glíma, that even for all the benefits the *glímubelti* would provide, it was essentially diminishing the honor and the beauty of glíma (Stefán Jónsson, 1964). In 1906 he was one co-founder of the Akureyri's

Youth Association and led the association to the foundation of the Icelandic Youth Association (UMFÍ) at Thingvellir in 1907 and was Jóhannes its first administrator. Jóhannes often referred to glíma as the sport of all sports and considered glíma as an equivalent of the Icelandic language as the most prized possession the Icelandic nation holds (Stefán Jónsson, 1964). In addition to practicing glíma, Jóhannes also studied acrobatics and tests of strength, e.g. he practiced by trying to lift a horse. This he did by using one of his fathers horses. He placed the horse in a barn, where he had prepared the lifting mechanism for the horse. Then he placed a canvas under the horse and attached ropes to its corners and started pulling. In matter of weeks Jóhannes had begun to lift the horse and it turned into quite the spectacle and many came a long way to witness it (Stefán Jónsson, 1964). In 1908 Jóhannes wrote a small booklet about glíma, which was titled *Icelandic Wrestling*, the booklet was only printed in English and was the first book to deal exclusively with the subject of glíma. By writing the book his goal was to popularize the sport beyond the borders of Iceland, although Jóhannes was young when he wrote the booklet he put forth many interesting claims and ideas on glíma within it, many that were not entirely true and have been rectified in many modern writings on glíma (Þorsteinn Einarsson, 2006). He competed at the three first *Íslandsglímunum* (e. Icelandsglímur) and won two of them. Jóhannes was a promoter for Iceland's first involvement to the Olympics in 1908, he was the first Icelander to compete at the Olympic games. He competed in Greco-Roman wrestling under the Danish flag, since Iceland was under Danish rule at the time, unfortunately he had to withdraw from competition due to an injury and therefore finished in 4<sup>th</sup> place. At the Olympics Jóhannes along with other Icelandic glímu-men held a show in glíma and attracted a lot of attention from the spectators. In 1908 Jóhannes went abroad with his glímu troupe to introduce glíma to other nations (Stefán Jónsson, 1964). He held shows in many countries from Moscow to San Francisco, mainly as a part of a circus show. He returned to Iceland in 1927 with all his savings from the showmanship and constructed Hotel Borg in Reykjavík in 1930. He died on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October in 1968.



#### 1.4 Glíma in the Media

Glíma is present in the Icelandic media throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At the beginning of the century the articles focus on the glímu legacy with numerous articles written about how proper Icelandic glíma is endangered and could be lost to us if nothing was to be done about it. In the second part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the focus shifts to a discussion about changing the rules in order to preserve the ancient sport.

In 1903 a small column about glíma appeared in the magazine *Ísafold*. The author talked about the lack of interest in glíma, he said that in earlier times it was a widely renowned sport in Iceland but today only a few people truly knew how to glíma. The youths in Reykjavík spent their free time on restaurants or other useless places instead of coming together and studying this very Icelandic sport (“*Glímur*”, 1903). There was a relatively long column written about glíma in 1906, in a magazine named *Lögberg*. There the author stated that the interest in glíma had been decreasing in the last twenty years or so, he talked about the new phenomena “dancing” and that it was plaguing the youth, none of them even thought about practicing glíma. His thoughts are that since glíma is one of the few things that Icelanders can truly call their own, we should take honor in preserving it (“*Glímur*”, 1906). In three years the sport-scenery in Iceland, especially the glíma aspect, had undergone considerable change. Because in 1909 many more positive articles started appearing in the media, concerning the prowess of wrestler Jóhannes Jósefsson at the Olympics in 1908 or stating the results from competition wrestling that were being held more frequently.

An extensive article on sports in Iceland was published in the magazine *Eimreiðin* in 1912. Its author was a man named Sigurjón Pétursson, a former wrestling champion of some renown. The article was about the history of competition wrestling since 1906 and is meant as a trivia for public regarding the contemporary sports incl. glíma (Sigurjón Pétursson, 1912). In 1916 an article in the magazine *Skinfaxi* insisted that the interest in glíma was yet again dwindling, even to the extent that glíma-clubs were being disbanded. He states that the public talks about the sport of glíma as outdated fun and is appalled that this has befallen our most national and beautiful sport. The author’s solution to counter this development is to start teaching glíma to young boys in primary school, by fit teachers (“*Glíman*”, 1916). In 1919 on the other hand there are more positive articles to be found on glíma. In *Morgunblaðið* there came an

extensive interview with Jóhannes Jósefsson and his achievements in popularizing the sport of glíma to the world, when he was in Iceland for a summer vacation from his showmanship (*Jóhannes Jósefsson*, 1919) and in *Vísir* there is an overview on what occurred at the latest Icelandic Championship in Glíma (*Islandsgliman*, 1919).

In 1923 an article appeared in *Vísir* talking about the exquisite beauty and vigor that glíma possesses, the author then states that the youth has not had the same privilege as the previous generation in learning true glíma. He says that in the most respectable glíma tournament, the Icelandic Championship in Glíma, it should be a theatre for the public to behold glíma at its finest, but sadly that is not the case anymore. He thinks that the brutes that have been competing are not honoring the true values of glíma and that parallel to the referees in the matches they both debase our fine sport. His conclusion is that Icelander's should look to the past and uphold the same virtue and manliness in glíma as our predecessors. He also thought that glíma had no business into the elementary schools unless it was taught properly (Valdemar Sveinbjörnsson, 1923). In 1934 there came an extensive 18 page article about glíma in the magazine *Jörð*, written by Arnór Sigurjónsson. In the article the author talks about the origins of glíma and how the art has evolved with the Icelandic nation into the sport it is. Then he says that even for all the great things that glíma possesses there are some things that is better in other sports, and some things that glíma simply lacks. For instance he mentioned that glíma is in no way a team sport not even in "*bændaglíma*", there is too much risk for injuries in glíma and the sport itself is too complex, which he indicates is the reason that glíma is not practiced outside of Iceland. In the end of the article the author says that the reason for the deterioration in glíma is because Icelander's are practicing more sports than ever before (Arnór Sigurjónsson, 1934). In 1948 there appeared an article in the magazine *Tíminn*, following a glíma tournament held by the club *Ármann* in Reykjavík written by an old glímu wrestler named Pétur Sigfússon. There the author said that he, as well as others that were born at the turn of the century, knew glíma as it was in the old days and was appalled by what he saw at the tournament. And since no other media in Reykjavík did mention anything about the glíma that was displayed at the tournament he decided to express his feeling about it. The author says that he feels that the glíma he saw has changed from the beautiful glíma that existed in Iceland in the old days to some kind of aspect of glíma that revolves solely around brute strength and that there have even some rules been interfused into the sport that

are contrary to the old glíma. He concludes by saying that the nation cannot allow this development within glíma to continue and that if glíma would ever be competed in international tournaments it would have to be the original glíma not this new variation of it that he saw (Pétur Sigfússon, 1948). In 1954 there appeared an article, written by a 65 year old farmer, in the magazine *Tíminn*. The article is akin to the previous article written by Pétur Sigfússon. The author says that he practiced glíma in his youth and that the glíma he remembers is very different from the present day glíma. He then compares the differences of the two aspects and his opinion is that the new aspect of glíma is not truly Icelandic glíma. He then reviews that once the Icelandic nation was close to losing the unique Icelandic language to the Danish influences that dominated Iceland and if we did not want to lose the uniqueness of our glíma we would have to react before the ones that remember true glíma all pass away (Jón Haraldsson, 1954). In 1965 there came a short article in *Tíminn* which reported that new provisions, at the initiative of Kjartan B. Guðjónsson, would be instated into the glíma laws. These new provisions were aimed at making the glíma a more beautiful sport by banning the excessive use of strength that has been a thorn in the side of glíma in recent years and trying to modify it to the original glíma again (“*Níð og bol*”, 1965). Here we see that reactions to the negative discussion about glíma in the media in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, i.e. the use of brute strength in glíma. In order to improve glíma and make it the beautiful sport that it was, the GLÍ convened new rules to ban the use of excessive strength. In 1973 an article appeared in *Morgunblaðið* about results from a glíma tournament in Reykjavík. In the article the author stated that in the matches he saw that there is still some signs of the use of strength rather than agility but not as much as it had been in recent decades (“*Aðeins einn*”, 1973). In 1988 there appeared an extensive article about many aspects of glíma by Jón M. Ívarsson, who was the secretary for GLÍ at the time. In the article he says that glíma is so much more than merely a sport it is a part of our culture and we have to preserve it as best we can, especially now since there have never been as much external cultural influences as there is today. He concludes the article by stating that glíma is at a turning-point after some regression it is advancing again, but on a weak foundation due to small number of practitioners (Jón M. Ívarsson, 1988). In 1991 there came a short article about the results in a glímu tournament in Reykjavík, written by the glímu expert Kjartan Bergmann Guðjónsson. As he was talking about the result he recounted the matches in a few words. He complimented one of the wrestlers and said that he

did not do a single thing wrong and his matches were very stylish and pleasing to look upon. Furthermore he said that most of the other wrestlers did show excellent performance but could adjust few aspects of their style (Kjartan B. Guðjónsson, 1991). In 2002 there appears an interview with the reigning Icelandic Champion in glíma, Ingibergur Sigurðsson. When asked about how glíma was today, he said that there were not many new competitors entering the senior competition groups but some growth in the junior groups. He was also asked what he thought was the best way to increase the practice of glíma in Iceland today. His answer was that it would need funding to pay for decent glíma instructors to teach the sport and that the media could also try to advertise glíma more than they do ("*Sjötti sigurinn*", 2001).

## **Chapter 2 - Boxing**

### **2.1 Origins of Boxing**

Originally boxing was nothing more than bare fist fighting between two competitors. Ancient Greeks believed that fighting was a game played by the Gods on Olympus and made fighting a part of the Olympic Games in 688BC. The Romans where very interested in boxing and it soon turned into a common spectators sport, the Roman form of boxing was often a fight to the death to please the spectators. In 393AD boxing was abolished due to excessive brutality (Gary Holland, 2007). Fist fighting started to emerge in England at the arrival of the Romans, though boxing as sport did not become popular until the early part of the eighteenth century (Nat Fleischer & Sam Andre, 1959). Boxing as we know it today is thought to have originated in England and the sport evolved there over the centuries, until it scattered throughout the civilized world (Lýður Björnsson, 1992).

### **2.2 Origins of Boxing in Iceland**

In the interwar period many new sports were introduced to Iceland. One of them was boxing which received a great amount of popularity over some time periods but was always greatly controversial in the same time. Ultimately boxing was banned by law in 1956 for almost fifty years (Sigurður Á. Friðþjófsson, 1994).

Boxing first arrived to Iceland through a man named Vilhelm Jakobsson, who studied the art of boxing when he was living in Denmark during World War one. He came back home to Iceland in the fall of 1916 full of zest for the sport and immediately set up classes and started teaching boxing. Among his first pupils was Eiríkur S. Bech, who took over teaching the class the following winter. Eiríkur went to Denmark in the fall of 1918 and returned in 1919 and resumed teaching, the interest in boxing went dwindling and soon all practices were disbanded (Örn Eiðsson, 1989). In 1926 practice resumed within two clubs in Reykjavík, KR and Ármann. A Faroese named Peter Wigeland taught at the Ármann club and Eiríkur S. Bech at the KR club. Later that same year the clubs held a boxing performance for the public for the first time. Two years later the first boxing tournament was held in a place called Gamla Bíó, a lot of spectators showed up to witness this new sport in action. The tournament was criticized in the media for showing brawls and advertising it as a sport. The following was written in Morgunblaðið April 24<sup>th</sup> 1928:

If our athletes think it is necessary to practice boxing, no one can tell them not to do so. They should then at least practice it quietly and not make fools of them self's fighting in front of other people, even though it is for a prize. There is no difference between fighting in the street and the fighting in Gamla Bíó, except those that fight in the street usually they have the excuse that they were drunk and did not know what they were doing (*"Hnefaleikar í Gamla Bíó"*, 1928:2).

It was maybe not out of the ordinary that boxing got this kind of coverage since the boxers in the tournament were inexperienced and the spectators not used to seeing this kind of full contact sport. The next official tournament was held in 1929 and was even bigger than the previous one, and the competitors had obviously taken great progress in the sport. On the other hand there were not nearly as many spectators attending this tournament as the first one. After the tournament, boxing got its first positive criticism in a sports magazine where the author was a big fan of boxing. In the years 1930-1931 boxing was discontinued yet again due to lack of accommodations and because Peter Wigeland, who was the most dynamic originator for boxing in Iceland at the time, moved away (Lýður Björnsson, 1994; Örn Eiðsson, 1989). In 1933 Hnefaleikafélag Reykjavíkur (Reykjavík boxing club) was founded

and in 1935 Þorsteinn Gíslason established a boxing school in Reykjavík and in doing so he revitalized boxing in Iceland. In the winter of 1935 there were numerous boxing events held and in the summer of 1936 the first Icelandic Championship in boxing was held. Twelve competitors fought in the tournament in five weight divisions. There was not another Icelandic Championship in boxing until 1943, that year the U.S. army set up a garrison in Iceland and that brought new life into the sport as they started training and competing with the Icelandic boxers. There was a clear interest in the public at the time to practice the sport the boxing division in the KR club even printed a textbook for their students to prepare for each class. The book is called; “Boxing” by Edwin L. Haislet and was translated into Icelandic and published by the KR club. The Icelandic Championship in boxing was then held every year until 1953 (Sigurður Á. Friðbjólfsson, 1994).

In 1950 the interest in boxing was reductive because of an increasing propaganda against boxing. The public thought that boxing was directly to blame for the increasing violent crimes in Reykjavík in recent years. That same year some foreign studies that revealed the dangers of boxing, particularly the danger of brain injury from head blows, appeared in the media. The last boxing tournament in Iceland was held in 1954 with few participants and was considered very weak. Two doctors, one of them was named Kjartan J. Jóhannsson, who were both members of parliament (Althingi) at the time, were the first to bring forth a bill on banning boxing in Iceland in March 1956. The bill got a lot of attention in media and was objected by the Icelandic Sports Federation. The bill did not pass this time, in the fall of 1956 Althingi assembled again and Kjartan J. Jóhannsson put forth another bill, this time with another doctor and a member of Althingi (Illugi Jökulsson, 2001). There were two members of Althingi who presented the bill to Althingi in the fall of 1956. They said in their statement that; “Boxing was one of the most unpleasing sport that Iceland has known. If a sport is defined as a healthy exercise, to make people healthy physically and mentally, then it is a false statement to call boxing a sport.”( Sigurður Á. Friðbjólfsson, 1994: 324). The bill was passed December 19<sup>th</sup> same year, regardless of protest from the Icelandic Sports Federation and the Sports Federation in Reykjavík (Sigurður Á. Friðbjólfsson, 1994). Hence it was illegal to host any kind of performance or competition in boxing. Furthermore it was illegal to teach boxing, use any boxing equipment and any violation to these laws should be fined (Lög um að banna hnefaleika, nr.92/1956). Boxing was banned in Iceland until 2002.

In 2001 there was another bill presented to Althingi about allowing Olympic boxing, the man leading the bill was Gunnar Birgisson. The main arguments for allowing Olympic boxing was that the sport was part of the Olympics and that it was unique that a country banned an Olympic event with a special legislation. There was to be made a clear difference between Olympic boxing and professional boxing in general, the bill also referred to numerous new studies about the risks in Olympic boxing. The conclusion from these researches was that injuries were uncommon and that there was no reason to ban the sport. Gunnar Birgisson indicated that Olympic boxing was not an unsafe sport compared to many others that were allowed in Iceland and that the individual should have the freedom to choose to practice Olympic boxing (Þingskjal, 39/2002). After this bill was presented there was a lot of debating in Althingi about it. The majority of the education committee agreed to the bill and proposed amendment about it, where among other things Olympic boxing would be called amateur boxing (Þingskjal, 435/2002). In the end Althingi passed the bill in February 2002 (Lög um áhugamannahnefaleika, nr.9/2002). Once again Icelanders had the freedom to practice boxing if they chose to do so, even though it was only Olympic boxing. Soon after the bill passed a new era began in the boxing history in Iceland. There emerged new boxing clubs that were independent from other sports clubs and only offered boxing, clubs like Hnefaleikafélag (e.boxing club) Reykjavíkur, Hnefaleikafélagið Æsir, Hnefaleikafélag Hafnarfjarðar and Hnefaleikafélag Reykjaness. Today there are also special set of rules for beginners in boxing, it is basically a gentler version of Olympic boxing and mainly constructed for children and teenagers, it is called “boxing for beginners”. With boxing for beginners there is more focus on technique and less on strength. When boxing for beginner’s gets to excessive in force or the match is uneven the technique exercise becomes very limited and then the purpose with boxing for beginners becomes useless (Kristinn Reimarsson, 2006). The boxing committee within ISI established rules about teenagers that practice boxing. In the youth groups there are three rounds and each round is 90 sec. If a teenager comes up against an older opponent the match should be conducted according to the youth group rules. A contestant that has not achieved ten matches in his career competes in three rounds, 90 sec. per round, instead of four, two minute rounds (Kristinn Reimarsson, 2006). In 2009 ISI published a statistics report which showed that there were 871 people who practiced boxing in Iceland, most of them in the capital area (Rúna H. Hilmarsdóttir, 2009: p.60).

### 2.3 Boxing in the Media

The sport of boxing has always been controversial in Iceland and there have been numerous articles written in the Icelandic media about it, both positive and negative. The media coverage on boxing is the setting for the debate about the controversial legislation that was passed on boxing and the positive articles about boxing seem to increase in the latter part of the century.

Jóhannes Jósefsson wrote an article in *Vísir* March 27<sup>th</sup> 1928 where he recommends boxing: “With everything considered, I think without a doubt that amateur boxing has to be considered a good and useful sport, for practice as well as for fun, with great athletic value, as well as being great fun both for those that practice it and the onlookers.” In this article Jóhannes recommends amateur boxing and says that there is a big difference between professional and amateur boxing and that it is relatively harmless to practice boxing and well worth it (Jóhannes Jósefsson, 1928). Not everyone agreed with Jóhannes as an article in *Morgunblaðið*, the same year shows where the author compared boxing to street brawling (“*Hnefaleikar í*”, 1928). An interview with Þorsteinn Gíslason, owner and founder of Reykjavík’s only boxing school at the time, appeared in the newspaper *Nýja dagblaðið* in 1936. There Þorsteinn stated that the only reason for the public’s animosity towards boxing was due to the fact that they did not know the sports true value and only gaze upon the few bad examples of boxing e.g. head injuries. And some think boxing is the successor of fist fighting among poorly civilized man. Most of the people who have this opinion have no idea what boxing really is and have never even seen boxing (“*Hnefaleikaskóli*”, 1936). In a countryside magazine called *Rauði fáninn* there appeared an article about boxing where the author glorified boxing and talked about his own experience in boxing as well as recommending it to others (Aðalsteinn Þorsteinsson, 1936). In 1939 there was an article in the magazine *Alþýðublaðið* sent in by a sport enthusiast. The author says that the only sport that he never sees anything written about in the newspapers is boxing which is surprising since there are numerous boxing clubs in Reykjavík that have a considerable amount of members. He then says that the boxing clubs are not doing enough for the sport and that his opinion is that Icelanders could succeed far in boxing, given the proper instruction and motivation (Carl Nielsen, 1939). In 1948, in *Morgunblaðinu*, there was an article written by Otto von Porat about the sport of boxing. Otto von Porat was a Norwegian heavyweight boxer and won a



gold medal in the 1924 Olympics in Paris. He wrote that many think boxing is a crude and brutal sport and mothers rarely allowed their sons to practise it. On the contrary he says that boxing equals other sports like fencing, both sports are all about reflexes and speed. Then he said that of course boxing could be a rough sport and you could expect to be hit hard but in boxing you are also taught how to defend yourself. He then says that he hopes that his presence in Iceland inspires the youth to practise boxing and increases general interest in boxing (Otto von Porat, 1948). In a magazine named *Heilbrigðismál* (e. Health care) doctors wrote articles about the hazardous aspects of boxing where they quoted foreign researches on the subject. In 1952 there was an article about the brain injuries that can be a result from head blows ("*Hnefaleikar og rothögg*", 1952) and in 1954 there was an article in the same magazine about kidney damage resulting from blows to the body ("*Hnefaleikar og*", 1954). In 1952 there came in article in *Tíminn* where the author stated that boxing did not have the favor of the public and that there was a public opinion that boxing were obnoxious. And that the only thing that boxing did was to inflame maleficent urges of teenagers and that love for boxing could be practically dangerous for the nation. He also said that the only reason to teach boxing was to teach it to selected groups, like the police ("*Hnefaleikar*", 1952). Only few weeks after boxing was banned by Althingi there came an article in *Vísir* where the author glorified the decision to ban boxing. He also said that boxing could by no means be called a sport and that Iceland set a precedent by banning the sport ("*Bann við*", 1957). In 1961 *Alþýðublaðið* displayed a letter from two boxing enthusiasts regarding the legislation on boxing. They thought that it was outrageous that a sport was being banned in a democracy and that boxing enthusiasts in general had to meet in secrecy to discuss and practice boxing (E. Sverrisson & P. Ragnarsson, 1961). After the legislation ban on boxing the media clearly focused more on the darker side of the sport. In 1970 there was an article in *Alþýðublaðinu* about a boxer dying in a boxing match in England ("*Þeir fórna lífinu*", 1970). A feature article about boxing appeared in *Vísir* in 1977, including an interview with an American boxer who said that he was sure that Icelandic youth could succeed far into boxing with the proper training and that boxing would be popular if they would allow the sport again. Another interview in the article was with Kjartan Jóhannsson, who was one of the doctors whom submitted the legislation ban in Althingi in 1956. In the interview Kjartan talks about the reasons for banning boxing in Iceland, which was mainly the increasing aggressiveness of the

boxers out on the streets towards the innocent public. He also says that there is so much money involved in the sport, incl. bets and prize money, that it has become impossible to ban it in many countries (Gylfi Kristjánsson, 1977). A comprehensive interview with Þorsteinn Gíslason, one of the biggest advocates for boxing in Iceland, appeared in *Þjóðviljinn* in 1988. Þorsteinn stated that he was making a petition and aiming to present it to Althingi to try and revoke the legislation on boxing. He also expressed his views on the unfairness of the legislation on boxing in the first place and talked loosely about the practical use and history of boxing in Iceland (“*Boxað með*”, 1988). The newspaper *Dagblaðið-Vísir (DV)*, executed a relatively small attitude survey about boxing. Six hundred people were chosen at random, with equal gender ratio and evenly divided between the capital area and the countryside. The question they were asked was; Are you for or against boxing being allowed again in Iceland? The results showed that 28% were for it, 12% were undecided, 2% didn't answer and 58% were against it (“*Meirihlutinn vill*”, 1993). According to this survey, even though this is a relatively small one, we can presume that the majority of the public was against allowing boxing again at that time period.

It seems clear that by looking at the media coverage, boxing has always been a controversial sport in Iceland. Some people think the sport should not even bear the name “sport” and that it resembles more to brutal fighting. While others think it is a beautiful form of self-defense and a sport that is good for our body and soul. Also the people who are for boxing believe that every individual should be able to choose if he wants to practice boxing or not. Since boxing was allowed again in Iceland the sport changed a lot from when it first started here, the use of headgear became an obligation and the goal in competitions was not to knockout the opponent but to score points with successful hits. Olympic boxing is a relatively popular sport in Iceland today and there are Icelandic Championships held every year with five to six clubs sending in competitors and the number of people practicing the sport grows rapidly every year.

## Chapter 3 - Judo

### 3.1 Origins of Judo

To understand Judo we have to look beyond the sport to its roots in martial arts in Japan. Japanese jujutsu is an ancient hand to hand combat system developed by the *bushi* in feudal Japan (samurai), their form of the art was manufactured for fighters fully clad in Japanese armor. Through the ages in Japan the art of jujutsu became more diversified and specialized, there were specific schools (*ryus*) establish to teach the art. The era of peace, which lasted for three hundred years after the Japanese civil wars, changed the art of jujutsu. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the ancient martial arts of Japan (*Bujutsu*), created for the warrior class, began to lose importance as the martial way (*Budo*), created for the commoner, gained interest. *Budo* was not only a collection of fighting techniques but also a way of life through spiritual discipline (K. Cavalcanti, 1995).

Dr. Jigoro Kano (1860-1938) is the founder of modern Judo. Kano was a pacifist and never viewed martial arts as a means to display physical prowess or superiority but studied them to find a way to live in peace with other human beings. Kano was undersized and weak in his youth, he decided to start practicing traditional forms of jujitsu in order to improve his health and to defend himself against bullies. After studying two forms of traditional jujitsu Kano began a comprehensive study of other forms of jujitsu, this study led Kano to actively rethink the jujitsu techniques he had learned. He realized that by combining the best techniques of various jujitsu schools into a single system he could create a physical education program that would embody mental and physical skill. And in 1882 Kano had taken the best throws and grappling techniques from traditional jujitsu and added a few of his own as well as removing the more dangerous techniques. At the age of 22, Kano presented his new sport, Judo. He named the sport Kodokan Judo (P. Rasmussen, 1999). The term *kodokan* translates into “The place for studying the way”. Judo similarly translates into “the gentle way” (Roy Inman 1995). A women’s section within Judo was established in 1926. Judo was intended to be a competitive sport and when Japan hosted the Olympics in 1964, Judo was given its opportunity and has been a part of the Olympic Games ever since (Roy Inman, 1995). Judo is systematically divided into phases. Traditionally a beginner gets a white belt which symbolizes that he is new to the sport, when he gets better he has to pass a test to achieve a

higher ranking within the Judo system and get a new belt. After a white belt there is a yellow one, then green, blue and then brown, these ranks are known as “Kyu”. After the “Kyu” there comes the master’s degree, “Dan”, which is signified with a black belt. There are ten rankings within the Dan, those below 6<sup>th</sup> Dan have black belts, between 6<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Dan bear red and white belts and 9<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Dan bear red belts. 12<sup>th</sup> Dan are signified with ivory white belt and are only awarded to those who have learned every aspect of Judo, only Dr, Jigaro Kano, founder of Judo, has been awarded the 12<sup>th</sup> Dan (Sigurður Jóhannsson, 1959).

### **3.2 Origins of Judo in Iceland**

Judo is a form of wrestling and every practitioner must wear a special uniform named judogi, which arrived from Japanese tradition and allows the Judo players to obtain better and firmer grips on each other. Judo was first practiced in Iceland in the fall of 1956 in the club Ármann. In the prime of 1957, as the legislation against boxing was passed by Althingi many of the boxing practitioners started practicing Judo instead. The Judodeild Ármanns (the Judo division in Ármann) is the oldest judo club in Iceland it was established February 2<sup>nd</sup> in 1957, by the initiative of a man named Sigurður H. Jóhannsson who is considered one of the leading pioneers in Judo in Iceland. Ármanns first Judo instructor was a German named Frihelm Geyer who was considered a great instructor by his students, but the goal was always to have an Icelander to teach Judo. Sigurður H. Jóhannsson received funds from the judo practitioners to go to Denmark and study Judo. Upon his arrival back home he imparted his knowledge to his students as well as introducing them to tournament rules in Judo (Lýður Björnsson, 1992). In the summer of 1958 there came a Japanese man to Iceland named Matsoka Sawamura. Judodeild Ármanns came into contact with him and discovered that he had a 5<sup>th</sup> degree black belt (5. Dan.) in Judo, he agreed to stay here for some time and teach Judo in Ármann (Þorkell Magnússon, 1959).

In 1967 a second Judo club was founded, named Judofélag Reykjavíkur (e. Reykjavík’s Judo club), along with Judodeild Ármanns these two clubs were the leading force in Judo’s growth in Iceland for the time being. The Icelandic Sports Federation established a special Judo committee in 1968 to work on establishing a federation for Judo in Iceland and maintain the Judo issues in the meantime. The committee held the first public tournament in 1970. The

Icelandic Judo Federation (IJF) was founded on January 28<sup>th</sup> in 1973, but the first Icelandic Judo Championship was held two years prior in 1971 by the Icelandic Judo clubs in collaboration with the Icelandic Sports Federation. At the tournament 24 players competed, 12 from Judofélag Reykjavíkur, 11 from Judodeild Ármanns and 1 player from Vestmannaeyjar. Svavar Carlsen from Judofélag Reykjavíkur won the championship title and held it for many years to come (judoland, n.d.).

Svavar Carlsen was Iceland's first big star in Judo he won the Icelandic Judo Championship in 1974-76 and received the silver medal in the Nordic Championship in 1973. In 1976 Icelandic Judo players competed at the Olympics for the first time (judoland, n.d.). The biggest achievement to date in Icelandic Judo history was achieved by a Judo player named Bjarni Friðriksson at the Olympics in Los Angeles in 1984 where he came in third place and was awarded the bronze medal. He was the second Icelander to ever receive a medal in the Olympics, the first being Vilhjálmur Einarsson who received the silver medal for triple jump in Melbourne in 1956 (Lýður Björnsson, 1992). Bjarni Friðriksson is one of Iceland's most notable athlete he competed at four Olympic Games, in Moscow 1980, Los Angeles 1984, Seoul 1988 and Barcelona 1992 (Gísli Halldórsson, 2003).

Today there are ten clubs in Iceland, but each has a different level of activity and they differ in size as well. The clubs are located in Reykjavík, Akureyri, Selfoss, Grindavík, Vogar, Hella, Egilstöðum, Ólafsvík and Suðarkrókur. All together there are estimated 1000 people that practice Judo in Iceland, although of that number there are only about 200-250 judo players that compete in the domestic tournaments (judoland, n.d.). Icelandic Judo practitioners frequently compete in tournaments abroad with good results. Most notable of them is Þormóður Jónsson who is ranked 53<sup>rd</sup> in the Judo world ranking system (Bjarni Friðriksson, 2011). In 2009 ISI published a statistics report which showed that there were 857 people who practiced Judo in Iceland at the time, most of them in the capital area (Rúna H. Hilmarsdóttir, 2009).

### 3.3 Judo in the Media

The sport of judo did not have regular coverage in Icelandic media until Bjarni Friðriksson's Olympic Games achievement. After that the Icelandic nation became more aware of judo's existence.

In 1958 a thorough article was printed in *Þjóðviljinn* by Matsoko Sawamura, a judo coach at Ármann, where he discusses the history of Judo (M. Sawamura 1958). This article is an attempt to introduce this new sport to the Icelandic nation, that same year there appeared a few more articles about or by Matsoko Sawamura in Icelandic media. In 1968 there came an article in the magazine *Frjáls verslun* about Judo and the growth of the sport. The article mentioned that at the time there were two Judo clubs in Reykjavík with 120 members combined ("*Judo*", 1968). In 1977 there came an article in *Alþýðurblaðið* where judo is described as something more than just a sport. It says that judo is the principle on maximum efficiency of mind and body, your perception will become more perceptive and sharper and you will get faster reflexes and more confidence ("*Vísindi heilbrigðslífs*", 1970). In 1977 there came an article in *Æskan*, about Icelandic athletes who have competed at the Olympics, which featured interviews with two Judo players. One of them, Viðar Guðjohnsen, when asked about judo said that many people think that judo is for brawler's which is a great misunderstanding, people who come to practices with that attitude were banned from coming. The other judo player, Gísli Þorsteinsson, said that the sport of judo was rapidly growing in Iceland and believed that judo was replacing glíma (Icelandic wrestling) as the preferred wrestling sport in Iceland. Mainly for one reason, because judo is an international sport and judo players in Iceland can train, and compete in, judo all over the world ("*Íþróttu-þættir*", 1977). In 1988 there appeared an interview with Bjarni Friðriksson in *Helgarpósturinn*. In the interview Bjarni talks about his preparations for the Olympics in Seoul and is aiming higher than he did in Los Angeles. He says that the interest for judo in Iceland grew following his success in the Olympics in 1984 but it is decreasing again. He thinks the media personality in Iceland shows judo little interest but it depends mainly on the sportswriters. He admits that judo is not the most popular sport in Iceland and it might be reasonable that it does not get the same coverage as other more popular sports ("*Stefnt til sigurs*", 1988). In 1994 there was an article in *Morgunblaðið* about an Open Scandinavian Championship which was held in Iceland. In that

article there was a column where the current judo national team coach said that the development in judo in Iceland was remarkable and that there were many young judo players in Iceland who showed great potential (“*Þróunin ótrúleg*”, 1994). In 2008 there was an article about Þormóður Jónsson in the newspaper *24 stundir*, the article reported that Þormóður had been invited to compete at the Olympic Games in China that same year. Following the article there was a column which featured a short interview with Bjarni Friðriksson, Þormóður’s coach. He said that Þormóður’s participation in the Olympic Games could have very positive effects on the development of judo in Iceland (“*Leggur allt*”, 2008).

## Chapter 4 - Karate

### 4.1 Origins of Karate

The origin of karate dates back more than thousand years. It is thought to have come into existence when the Shao Lin art of fighting was imported to Okinawa and blended with the indigenous fighting techniques on the island. This mixed martial art, due to its Chinese origin, was named karate, which literally means “Chinese hands”, later changed to “empty hands”. Karate was first introduced to the public in Japan in 1922 with great success and in 1936 opened the first karate school, *Shotokan*. In 1955 the Japan Karate Association was established, ten years later the association had over 100.000 members and approximately 300 affiliated karate clubs throughout the world (Masatoshi Nakayama, 1986).

In karate there is a similar ranking system as in Judo and a very similar uniform. There are four karate style recognized as a competitive form by the World Karate Federation, these styles are *Shito Ryu*, *Goju Ryu*, *Shotokan* and *Wado Ryu*. All karate styles are practiced in three ways; *kihon* (basic training and technique), *kata* (a fight with an imaginary opponent with predetermined moves) and *kumite* (a free fight between two individuals) (Karatedeild Fjölnis, n.d.).

## 4.2 Origins of Karate in Iceland

In 1970 the first karate practices were held in Iceland at the initiative of two Japanese, who both held a 3.dan in karate, they taught karate in Iceland for 4 months but did not rank any of their students because they did not have permission from their sensei (master) in Japan (Karl Gauti Hjaltason, 1983).

In 1971 a man named Rodger Z. Santos started training Icelanders in karate, when he taught the sport for eight months in Reykjavík. Early in 1973 Santos moved to Vestmannaeyjar and established a karate club there. His former students in Reykjavík relocated to accommodation on Laugarvegur and establish KFR (Karatefélag Reykjavíkur, e. Reykjavík's Karate Club) on September 13<sup>th</sup> 1973. A year later KFR hired a Japanese man named Kenichi Takefusa to teach karate at the club, Kenichi had married an Icelandic women and settled in Iceland. Kenichi had a 2. Dan in *goju ryu* karate and only taught that style of karate. Under the tutelage of Kenichi KFR flourished well and was moved to new accommodations in 1975. In 1976 there was a *budo*-festival held in Reykjavík, where the current world champion in karate named Masahiko Tanaka 6. Dan held an exhibition. The first tournament in *goju ryu* in Iceland was also held at the *budo*-festival. In 1978 KFR is relocated again and in the years 1977-78 Kenichi Takefusa gradually stops teaching at the club and the students eventually took over teaching (Karl Gauti Hjaltason, 1983).

In 1975 Santos returned to Reykjavík and established KFÍ (Karatefélag Íslands, e. Iceland's Karate Club), there he taught the style *Shotokan*. In 1977 KFÍ was disbanded and most of its students quit practicing karate or moved over to KFR. In 1979 some former students revived KFÍ and started practices again, Santos taught there on and off and entirely quit in 1981. Then the name of the club was changed to Shotokan Karate club. As a requirement from ÍBR (Reykjavík Sports Union) the club was renamed Karatefélagið Þórshamar (e. Thors hammer Karate Club) in 1982 (Karl Gauti Hjaltason, 1983).

In 1985 KAI (Karatesamband Íslands, e. the Icelandic Karate Federation) is established and that same year the first Icelandic Karate Championship held. In the tournament competed members from eight karate clubs. According to KAI it was obvious after the tournament that more tournament experience was needed in Iceland. That same year, even though there had only been one karate tournament in Iceland, the administration at the Icelandic Karate Federation agreed to hold the Nordic Championship in Reykjavík. According to KAI there



were numerous things that went wrong at the tournament but it was overall a success and a great trial for the Icelandic Karate Federation (Karatesamband Íslands, 1985).

The Icelandic Karate Championship has been held every year in Iceland since 1985, both in *kumite* and *kata*. Numerous other tournaments have also been held in Iceland, both youth tournaments as well as the Nordic Championship. Icelandic karate players have been frequenting tournaments overseas and Icelandic karate clubs have had many great karate practitioners come to Iceland to impart their wisdom to Icelandic karate players. Today, according to the Icelandic Karate Federation's official homepage, there are 12 karate clubs in Iceland with over 1200 practitioners (Rúna H. Hilmarisdóttir, 2009).

#### **4.3 Karate in the Media**

There have been some controversies about karate in the Icelandic society. Mainly because of the large amount of kung fu and karate movies that were being shown in the Icelandic cinemas, that portrays karate as a killing tool. The administration of the Icelandic Karate Federation also worked hard at maintaining a good image for karate in the media.

In 1974 there came an article in the newspaper *Vísir* about the newly established Karate Club in Reykjavík (KFR). The purpose of the article was for the members of KFR to correct the public's misunderstanding regarding karate. They said that people thought that karate was the study of how to kill or seriously hurt people effectively and these ideas originate from oriental fight movies about karate and kung fu. That is a big misunderstanding, karate is a sport used to improve your physical and mental state and those who train in karate do so under great discipline. They also mention that many people are coming to try karate in Iceland but most of them have misconceptions about the art because of the above-mentioned movies (*"Austurlenzku"*, 1974). In 1986 an article appeared in *Morgunblaðið* which was about the development of karate as a sport in Iceland since the first clubs were established. The author discusses the vast interest that Icelanders seem to have in karate and how the sport has spread around the country in a short time, with many karate clubs being established all around Iceland (Karl Gauti Hjaltason, 1986). In 1991 there appeared an anonymous article in the *Morgunblaðið*, aimed at undermining karate. The author says that karate is no sport at all, it is merely the idolization of violence and the people behind these karate clubs are only

advocating karate in hopes of making money, by receiving funds and practice fees from unsuspecting parents. He also says that karate is bound to adversely affect Icelandic youth and concludes the article by urging the city officials in Reykjavík as well as the local authorities all over Iceland to stop supporting this so called “sport” (“*Hvað er karate?*”, 1991). Only three days later there came a response in the same newspaper, written by the president of the Icelandic Karate Federation. The article begins by saying that whoever displays his or hers opinions anonymously must be embarrassed by his opinions. Then the author explains the competitive forms of karate and why karate is and should be defined as a sport, he also says that parents are generally happy about their children’s conduct and attitude in regards with karate. The article concludes with the author inviting the anonymous writer to try a karate seminar for free at any Icelandic karate club (Karl Gauti Hjaltason, 1991). In 2009 there came a small interview in *Fréttablaðið* with the president of the karate club Þórshamar. In the interview he says that karate is for both males and females and that there are many reasons why people are practicing karate. Karate can be practiced as a martial art, a competitive sport or only for physical training. It all depends on the practitioners goals in the sport. Furthermore he says that the sport gives its practitioners insight into the origins and development of oriental martial arts. Many practitioners also adopt all sorts of traditions from karate (“*Fyrir konur jafnt*”, 2009)

## **Chapter 5 - Taekwondo**

### **5.1 Origins of Taekwondo**

Taekwondo is a Korean martial art, the word Taekwondo literally means the “art of kicking and punching” (Soon Man Lee & Gaetane Ricke, 1999). Taekwondo has a long and rich history in Korea passed down from primitive tribesman, to feudal soldier, to contemporary sports enthusiasts, being refined and enhanced through the generations. In the 90’s Taekwondo was the fastest growing martial art in the world. As Taekwondo spread around the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century the sport was in need of standardized rules and a governing body to enforce those rules, for that purpose the World Taekwondo Federation (WTF) was founded in 1973. In 1980 the sport of Taekwondo was recognized by the International Olympic

Committee, which encouraged its popularity greatly. Taekwondo made its debut in the Olympic Games in the year 2000 (Soon Man Lee & Gaetane Ricke, 1999). In Taekwondo there is a similar ranking system as in karate or judo as well as a similar outfit.

## **5.2 Origins of Taekwondo in Iceland**

Taekwondo has been practiced in Iceland since 1974. At the beginning Taekwondo was only practiced at the Keflavík airbase. In 1974-1978 an active Taekwondo club named Toraki Taekwondo was supervised by the American Ron Hartman at the airbase, both Americans and Icelanders practiced there (Taekwondosamband Íslands, n.d.).

The first Icelandic Taekwondo club was established in 1987 in Hafnafirði, named Dreki (Dragon), at the initiative of a man named Steven Leo Hall. Three years later a Taekwondo committee was established within the ISI. That same year three men named Michael Jörgensen, Kolbeinn Blandon and Ólafur William Hand established a Taekwondo division within the already active club ÍR in Reykjavík. In 1993 the Taekwondo club Einherjar was established by Ægir Sverrisson. In 1994 a Taekwondo division within the club Fjölnir was founded by Sigursteinn Snorrason and in 1995 a division was also established within Ármann by Michael Jörgensen and Ólafur William Hand. In 1993 a Taekwondo division was founded within the club HK by Sverrir Tryggvason, that same year a division was also founded within the club Þór in Akureyri. In 2000 a Taekwondo division within the club Björk in Hafnafirði was established and later that same year a division was also established in Keflavík by Sigursteinn Snorrason (Taekwondosamband Íslands, n.d.).

In 2002 ISI established Taekwondosamband Íslands (TKÍ, e. the Icelandic Taekwondo Federation) and thus became a qualifying sport within ISI. That same year another Taekwondo division was established, this time within the club Afturelding, by Sigursteinn Snorrason. In 2003 Sigursteinn also founded a Taekwondo club in Selfoss. In 2005 a Taekwondo division was established within the club Fram and a year later the youngest Taekwondo division to date was founded by Sigursteinn Snorrason within the club KR (Taekwondosamband Íslands, n.d.).

By this short overview of the brief history that Taekwondo has in Iceland, we can see that most of the Taekwondo clubs and divisions are founded by the same group of people. The

reason for this is probably that the sport is so young in Iceland that the same group that started practicing realized that in order to expand the sport they had to introduce it to the public. Today there are 15 registered Taekwondo clubs in Iceland according to the official homepage of the Icelandic Taekwondo Federation. These clubs have over 900 practitioners in Iceland (Rúna H. Hilmarisdóttir, 2009).

### **5.3 Taekwondo in the Media**

Taekwondo had no media coverage in Iceland before the mid 1990's. The first articles to be found about Taekwondo in Iceland are from the mid 90's and they are all aimed at introducing this new sport to the public. After the turn of the century more articles appeared about the sport mainly reporting the rapid growth of the sport.

In 1995 appeared an article in *DV* about a young Icelander who won the youth group in the Nordic Championship. The article stated that even though the sport is not popular in Iceland it is very popular in the other Scandinavian countries (“*Æfi allt að*”, 1995). In 2009 appeared a small article in *Fréttablaðið* which stated that Taekwondo was a growing sport in Iceland with nearly 1000 practitioners. The article explains the different forms of Taekwondo that are taught in Iceland, e.g. Olympic style of Taekwondo and the so called breaking tournaments, that is basically a competition in breaking different items with one blow (“*Nítíu present*”, 2009). There are no documents dating the first Icelandic Taekwondo Championship to be found on the official page of the Icelandic Taekwondo Federation. An article in the newspaper *Morgunblaðið* from 1995 describes the second Icelandic Taekwondo Championship consequently we can assume that the first tournament was held the year before. In 1996 an article in the newspaper *DV* reports that Icelandic Taekwondo players won six medals in the Nordic Championship that was held in Iceland that same year (“*NM í taekwondo*”, 1996).

## Chapter 6 – Mixed Martial Arts

### 6.1 Origins of Mixed Martial Arts

Mixed martial arts (MMA) is a full contact combat sport that allows striking with the hands and feet as well as grappling and submissive wrestling. MMA as a sport derived from the full contact sport of *Vale tudo* in Brazil. The Ultimate Fighting Championship was created in the U.S. in 1993. It was a tournament between various martial arts with minimal rules. The martial arts that participated included karate, jiu-jitsu, kickboxing, boxing, wrestling, sumo and other combat sports. It wasn't long until the fighters realized that if they wanted to be competitive among the best, they needed to train in additional martial arts. The fighters, and the generation of upcoming fighters that witnessed the UFC, began to adopt techniques from different martial arts in order to fight standing or on the ground. This blend of fighting styles became known as mixed martial arts (Ultimate Fighting Championship, n.d.).

### 6.2 Origins of Mixed Martial Arts in Iceland

In Iceland the origins of MMA and Brazilian jiu-jitsu (BJJ) are closely woven together, as it most likely is in many other countries. In 1993 at the first UFC tournament the smallest contender became the champion, that man was Royce Gracie a member of the notorious Gracie family who are famous for developing the art known as Brazilian jiu-jitsu. Royce won the tournament without having to throw a punch or a kick he subdued his opponents with joint locks and chokes. After the tournament BJJ spread like wildfire throughout the world, incl. in Iceland.

In 2005 the first official BJJ and MMA gym was established in Reykjavík, Iceland. The gym was named Mjöllnir, according to the official webpage of Mjöllnir, the name was chosen because many of the founding members originate from the karate club Þórshamar. Even though the first MMA/BJJ gym was not officially established until 2005, Icelandic martial arts enthusiasts had been getting together after karate, judo or boxing practices and practicing some BJJ fundamentals they saw on some video tape. After the establishment of Mjöllnir the sport grew immensely in Iceland and today there are five gyms in Iceland that offer MMA/BJJ, besides Mjöllnir there is Combat Gym (Reykjavík), Fenrir (Akureyri), Pedro

Sauer/Gracie jiu-jitsu (Hafnafjörður) and Sleipnir (Keflavík). Of these gyms Mjöllnir and Combat gym are by far the largest.

### **6.3 Two Icelandic Mixed Martial Artist in the Media**

There has not been much media coverage of MMA since its arrival in Iceland. Some articles appeared about the sport but most of them are centered about the few professional mixed martial artists in Iceland.

In 2009, in an interview with the newspaper Fréttablaðið, the president of Mjöllnir says that there were 375 members practicing MMA/BJJ in Mjöllnir (“*Barist i*”, 2009). In another interview, this time in 2011, he states that there were over 400 people registered into the club and the number is always growing (“*Endurspeglar fornfræg*”, 2011). Two notable Icelandic MMA fighters are regularly mentioned in the media, Gunnar Nelson (Mjöllnir) and Árni Ísaksson (Combat Gym). Árni Ísaksson started training MMA in 2005, then 21 years old, and has since then won titles in amateur and professional MMA competitions (“*Tæknin sigraði*”, 2011). Gunnar Nelson made his debut in Icelandic media in 2007 when an article about him receiving the purple belt in BJJ appeared in *Morgunblaðið*, at the time Gunnar was 18 years old (“*Glímdi við*”, 2007). Gunnar Nelson is today considered a true prodigy in MMA at the age of 24 he has participated in 9 professional MMA fights and won them all and he is the only Icelander that has ever received the black belt in Brazilian jiu-jitsu (Mjöllnir, n.d.).

## Conclusion

By taking a closer look at the number of practitioners each sport have, provided by the ISI, it is quite shocking to see that the oldest sport and only Icelandic martial art has the fewest. Glíma had just fewer than 400 practitioners while at the MMA club Mjöllnir, alone, there are over 400 practitioners. Consider that glíma is over 1000 years old in Iceland, while the club Mjöllnir is seven years old and teaching a sport that is relatively new to the world.

No sport in Icelandic history has instigated as much controversy in the media as boxing did. The reason for that is probably that boxing ahead of its time, being introduced to Iceland around 1920. There have been no objections from any social group about MMA, even though that sport can be considerably more brutal. Of course the Icelandic nation has changed considerably since 1956, when boxing was banned, and with every new thing there come new perspectives.

Judo was present in Iceland when boxing was banned and karate arrived only 13 years later, yet these sports did not undergo the same harsh criticism as boxing did. A likely explanation for this is that the Icelandic nation seems to have embraced the oriental ideology which followed judo and karate and look at it more as a lifestyle then as martial arts.

The changes that martial arts have imparted upon Icelandic society are not as important as many other aspects that influence our society. In ancient times glíma came to existence because society needed it, for warfare, warmth or entertainment. In modern times there is less need for martial arts, though it is a great way to exercise one's body and mind.

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