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Franz Beckenbauer Honored by FILA



SALZBURG, AUSTRIA-- German football legend Franz Beckenbauer was honored by FILA for his contribution to the Olympic Wrestling campaign in a ceremony hosted by the Austrian and German Wrestling Federations in Salzburg, Austria. He was presented FILA's highest honor, the Golden Necklace, an award usually given to heads of state.



In May, at a crucial time for the sport of wrestling trying to regain a spot in the Olympic Games, Beckenbauer took the initiative to campaign on the sport's behalf. He issued a strong statement of support, he spoke with German IOC member Thomas Bach, who later became IOC President and he put his name to the movement in the early and crucial stages of the battle to keep the sport in the Olympics.

That support helped Wrestling reach its goal on September 8 in Buenos Aires, Argentina, when the IOC's full session gave the sport a first round endorsement to remain a part of the Olympic Games program.

The award was presented to Beckenbauer by FILA Bureau member Rodica Yaksi of Turkey. FILA President Nenad Lalovic was unable to attend because of surgery to repair a broken

arm, but he spoke to the audience in a special video.

"Fran Beckenbauer is the most popular and respected international athlete in my country (Serbia)" he said. "Despite as a football player sending many of our citizens to bed with tears in their eyes. Franz said he grew up wanting to be a wrestler but his coaches told him he was too skinny and to try another sport. The world is pretty glad that he did. "

Beckenbauer is the only man to have won a World Cup Championship as a player and as a manager and remains as one of the greatest players in the history of the sport. He was captain of the West German team when they won the World Cup and the European Championship and he led his club, Bayern Munich, to three straight European Cups .

The awards ceremony was held in Casino Salzburg in the picturesque Austrian Alps with the building lit up with the Olympic Rings and a sign in lights that said Danke Franz.

Attending the ceremony were Manfred Werner, president of the German Wrestling Federation and Thomas Reichenauer, president of the Austrian Federation.

Lalovic closed his video presentation by emotionally thanking Beckenbauer for his efforts to help save Olympic Wrestling and saying, "Franz has already conquered the hearts of all the football fans in the world. This year he conquered the hearts of the wrestling fans."

