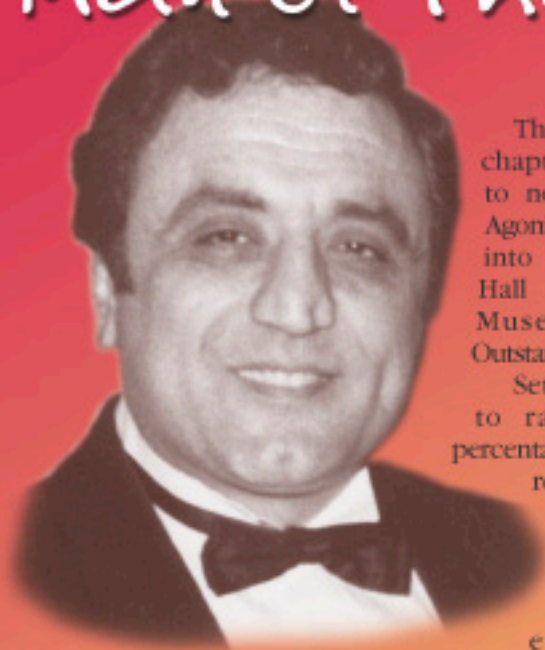


SETRAK AGONIAN

Man of the World By Stan Bishop



The Long Island chapter is pleased to nominate Setrak Agonian for induction into the National Hall of Fame and Museum as an Outstanding American.

Setrak may have to raise the last percentage in his jocular reference to the great passion he regularly throws behind all his many enterprises,

especially athletics at the national level. "I am a 300% man," he exclaims—"100% Armenian, 100% Bulgarian%, 100% American!"

Born, raised, and educated in Bulgaria of Armenian parentage, Setrak's leadership skills blossomed upon re-locating to America in 1967, becoming an American citizen five years later. At the New York Athletic Club Set met his American wrestling mentor, Bill Farrell who recruited him as assistant team leader and interpreter for the 1971 United States contingent at the World Freestyle Championships in his birthplace, Sofia, Bulgaria and then as team leader at the Munich Olympics the following year. Ever since Setrak has had a hand in the organization of wrestling competition at World Championships and the Olympics.

In 1984 Setrak founded the Metropolitan Wrestling Association, an adjunct of USA Wrestling to develop and promote wrestling in the New York area, especially in New York City schools. The MWA under Set's leadership convinced the New York Olympic bid group, NYC2012, to hold the 2001 World Freestyle Championships in Madison Square Garden to show the world that New York could host a successful amateur athletic event. After dogged but successful promotion of the event, the 9/11 tragedy intervened, thus erasing this prospect. Undeterred, Set and his colleagues campaigned to bring the same event back to New York in 2003. The international governing body for wrestling, FILA, had already awarded the freestyle portion to Slovakia and Greco-Roman to France. Now representing USA Wrestling, Set persuaded Slovakian wrestling authorities to release the freestyle competition to the United States. Although France chose not to release Greco-

Roman, FILA awarded the first women's competition to the United States. And so the 2003 World Freestyle and Women's Championship did come to Madison Square Garden. Set's leadership bore fruit in that this event became the best-attended amateur wrestling event ever.

But Set Agonian is far more than just a wrestling promoter. Coming of age behind the Iron Curtain and then moving to America gave him a unique perspective of both sides in the Cold War. Since becoming an American citizen, Set has used wrestling as well as boxing and soccer as a bridge to bring disparate peoples together in a spirit of friendly competition that leads to building relationships. The short list of his athletic diplomacy includes-

- Establishing the MWA, thus enabling him to manage dual meets among the United States, Russia, Bulgaria, and Armenia,
- Organizing a duel meet between American and Soviet teams at Madison Square Garden, marking the first competition of the superpowers since the Soviets boycotted the 1984 Olympics,
- Establishing the first boxing match between the police departments of New York City and Moscow,
- Arranging for an Armenian (then a republic within the Soviet Union) wrestling team to compete against team in New City and Boston,
- Pestering Goodwill Games organizers in 1998 to include wrestling as part of the competition at Madison Square Garden,
- Working tirelessly to bring the aforementioned World Freestyle Championships to Madison Square Garden, first in 2001 and then in 2003.

In all of this Setrak's fluency in six languages—English, Armenian, Bulgarian, French, Russian, and German facilitated his labors.

Setrak's creativity and energy extend well beyond wrestling. He serves the NYAC in many capacities and is highly active in the Woodside, Queens Kiwanis Club. Upon arriving in America, Setrak worked as a machinist and fabricator for several companies. After a few years he struck out on his own, founding International Creative Metals, Inc., a maker of ornamental metal work, where he works as CEO.

A highlight in this remarkable man's life occurred just before the finals of the 2003 Freestyle World Championships. With his mentor, Bill Farrell looking on, Setrak was called out to the center mat where he was presented the FILA Gold Star, the highest award bestowed by the international ruling body of wrestling. Although we acclaim him as an "Outstanding American," Set is truly a man of the world—the wrestling world.