

# Cultural Spotlight: What is Canarian Wrestling?

## A Grapplin' Gorillas Special Issue

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For those who don't know, I have been a Spanish teacher for 20 years.

I have a few passions in life - Spanish language and culture, and Wrestling, being two of them.

Sometimes our seemingly completely different interests can merge. As a student of the different grappling arts, I learned from a colleague about Canary Island Wrestling. This is the style of Wrestling that has a rich tradition in the Canary Islands, an archipelago of Spain, located off the western coast of Morocco. Naturally, once I heard of this, I had to learn more!

The island of Tenerife is the largest and most populated island of the Canary Islands, and hosts one of the world's largest carnivals, the Carnival of Santa Cruz de Tenerife. It is working towards designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

In late April or early May, the Challenge Tournament, or the *Torneo de Envite* is held in the town of Tegueste - not far from the capital city of Santa Cruz. During the town's *Romería de San Marcos* festival, one can witness the annual showcase of the Canary Islands' traditional competitive and rural sports - *La Lucha Canaria*, *La Bola Canaria* (Canarian Bowling), oxen pulls, handball and more.

Unlike Folkstyle wrestling, which takes place on a mat, *La Lucha Canaria* takes place in a dirt ring, known as a "Terrero".



Instead of wearing a singlet as Folkstyle (or Scholastic/Collegiate) competitors do, the Canarian Wrestler wears shorts and typically a polo shirt representing their team. Still, one strong similarity is **hip control**. The Canarian Wrestler will grab the shorts of their opponent to control them, and in Folkstyle, hip control is pivotal in scoring from the feet.

These Canarian Wrestling matches are performed barefoot, with each wrestler using various "*Mañas*" (techniques) in an attempt to unbalance their opponent. There are three major techniques used in competition: grasp, block, and deflect.

While doing this, the goal is to stay on your feet, because if any part of your body other than your bare feet touches the ground, you lose the "*Agarrada*" (round). This is very different from Folkstyle Wrestling, where touching the mat is allowed, since getting lower than your opponent is one of the best approaches to taking them down.



In a *Lucha Canaria* match, a competitor who wins the best of three such rounds is declared the winner, and the team with the most wins is the champion of the "*Brega*." Just like modern-day competitive sports, a "*Brega*" (bout) is the matchup between two 12-member teams. The teams are led by coaches who decide which players will go up against the competition, and a referee-type official makes the calls and declares the winners. This is similar to the "dual meet" structure in Folkstyle, where each team matches up with the competitors from the opposing lineup.

Recently, La Lucha Canaria has become a very popular sport and form of entertainment among Canarian girls, even in continental Spain. I'll be fulfilling a personal dream by visiting the Canary Islands to learn more about this rich tradition!

Warm Regards,  
-Glenn

*Lucha Canaria / Canarian Wrestling* (2011). Retrieved from <http://www.whattenerife.com/canary-island-sport.html>

*Tenerife*. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tenerife>. "Instituto Nacional de Estadística. (National Statistics Institute)". Ine.es. Archived from the original on 21 January 2009. Retrieved 19 September 2012.