

47

### How Can We Improve the Sport of Wrestling?

The sport of wrestling is an incredibly detailed, in-depth sport that has many layers of understanding to it. The longer one participates in wrestling, the more they learn that it's not just battling whoever may be in front of you. Wrestling teaches not only how to use leverage and speed to score on an opponent, but it also teaches valuable life lessons such as "hard work beats talent when talent doesn't work hard," as stated by Tim Notke. Personally, I believe that wrestling has earned more respect and recognition than it is given, and that is an aspect of wrestling that needs improvement. Some potential solutions are more exposure of the sport to the public and more support from schools to encourage students to wrestle or take an interest in understanding that it's much more than what many currently perceive it to be.

There are many sports that are televised regularly and allow the public to view free of charge. As of right now, wrestling has few events televised other than the NCAA D1 Championships which only occur once a year. Opportunities for people to learn the sport are miniscule compared to those for basketball, baseball, hockey, and football. If more tournaments in college and high school were televised or streamed on a free service, it would likely gain more recognition and attention, which is greatly needed. However, even with more exposure and televised events, viewers new to the sport would benefit from guidance to better understand the basics of the sport. It can be difficult to pick up on what is happening in wrestling and how points are being scored without some explanation. Commentators explaining the different techniques would provide an understanding to viewers of why the wrestlers are in certain positions and taking offensive and defensive actions. For example, when one wrestler throws in an underhook, a great defensive move is to take the palm of your hand that is hooked and punch it to the inside of the opponent's thigh. This prevents the opponent from potentially scoring with the underhook. Commentators are currently used at higher levels of wrestling, but I feel they are needed at middle

school and high school matches as well, especially in these current times with more events being streamed online and spectators being more isolated. If more people understand what is going on in the sport, they are more likely to follow it and support it, and more athletes may be inclined to participate.

While televising and streaming the sport to the general public is a great way to increase recognition and interest, schools promoting their wrestling program to their students would also help immensely. Schools play a big role in promoting sports and activities at a younger age. In my experience, wrestling unfortunately seems to have less attention in schools than do other sports like football, basketball, and baseball. The schools and coaches not promoting wrestling does a disservice to its athletes, because wrestling is not just a single sport. It serves as an excellent vehicle to learn valuable foundations for any sport, including things like agility, flexibility, endurance, positioning, mental toughness and much more. If schools and coaches of other sports would recommend wrestling to their students and athletes and speak of its benefits, it would gain more widespread popularity and support. The schools need to support wrestling more as a sport but also recognize it as an opportunity to learn life lessons. Dan Gable said, "Once you've wrestled, everything else in life is easy." For me, this statement holds true. Wrestling not only challenges the body but also the mind. Wrestlers need to be as mentally strong as they are physically strong because it is just you and your opponent on the mat. Wrestling is not a sport where you can lean on a teammate to pick it up if you are slacking. Everything comes down to the individual that is on the mat. Schools can use wrestling to build confidence among their student athletes and to apply lessons and skills learned to other things in their lives. Wrestling doesn't have to be someone's main sport to benefit from it.

Schools promoting wrestling in their districts as much as some of their other sports would be a huge improvement. They need to advertise it across all ages, especially the youth. Self schools can build strong elementary programs to introduce kids to the sport at a young age, that



can have a lasting effect on the programs that come after elementary. When wrestlers start at a young age, they view it as either fun or boring, and most will see it as a fun activity and want to continue. What young child doesn't want to participate in something that's fun to them? When a person starts an activity at a young age, they build the desire to continue doing it and if they progress through the sport while they are young, they are more likely to continue into middle school, high school, and potentially college. This progression will naturally build a love for the sport and then they will want to share that passion with their friends down the road.

Wrestling is a unique sport unlike any other. Not only does it encourage physical fitness, strength, and mental toughness, but it teaches countless life lessons. However, it needs support to continue growing as a sport. Media needs to better cover the sport, and schools need to promote wrestling programs across the district starting with youth programs. We as a community must "trust the process," improve the sport, and do whatever we can to keep it going, because in my experience, wrestling has equipped me with everything I need to take on my college career and future.