



FROM PINS TO PEN . . . AS I SEE IT!

By Wade Schalles

There will be a time, and it's coming, when the nation's state high school associations will be sponsoring women's wrestling. Hopefully a little sooner rather than later but in either case, not without a few hurdles. It's a typical Catch 22... you can't get a job without experience and you can't get experience without a job. In the case of women's wrestling, schools are reluctant to sponsor teams without the sport first receiving the seal of approval from their high school association. The high school associations won't sanction a sport until a certain number of teams, usually 35 or more are holding competitions within their state. Again, Catch 22. Over the last two years I've watched quite a few women's events. I've talked with the parents, conversed with the athletes and enjoyed some pretty exciting

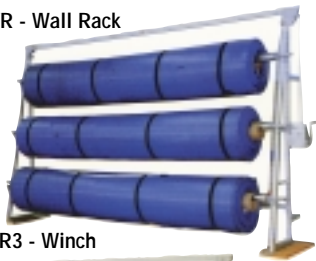
wrestling during my search to know more about the sport. Two things became perfectly clear as I traveled. One, there is a much larger interest in women's wrestling from the general student population than most of us are aware. And two, when the sport does establish itself, we need to have in place a dovetailing mechanism to minimize the conflict that's bound to develop between the feminine side of the sport and the men's programs. It's inevitable, when you put two cooks in the same kitchen there are bound to be challenges. As to the interest factor, what I found was a surprisingly strong support base for women's wrestling. Certainly enough coeds to field full programs at each of the high schools I visited. Now I'm talking about the current non-participants here, the women who have yet to step on a mat. They were the ones I spent most of my time interviewing about what they thought of the sport? Did they think they would like wrestling? Would they consider coming out if they had the opportunity? The only reoccurring theme was... 'the women would wrestle as long as the work-outs and competitions were against same-sex partners. Another Catch 22. With the sport in its formative years, women have to wrestle with the men whether they like it or not to get workouts. The same opposite sex match-ups is forced upon the women in dual meets and tournaments as well. The results are noticeable numbers of women being denied the opportunity to compete in wrestling. Now I realize their choice not to wrestle is self imposed abstinence. And some might argue that if the women really wanted it bad enough, they would endure sharing time with the men's programs for the opportunity to wrestle. The same people might also argue that in fact they aren't being denied opportunities, they are just being overly sensitive and selective. However, I'm not sure that's a fair representation of what's really happening. It's similar to building a Baptist church in a Jewish settlement and saying "what's the problem, the local folks have a place to worship. It's just not a reasonable request

to expect them to wrestle members of the opposite sex. The end result is current squad numbers remain low which then perpetuates men and women working out and competing together. These low numbers assure that the high school associations won't sanction the sport. Without sanctioning the high school athletic departments refuse to offer women's wrestling as a sport. Then the only alternative for the ladies is to be part of the men's programs. And around and around they go!

Maybe this is a charge for the N.O.W. group or the Women's Sports Foundation who have been such staunch supporters of Title IX. Success with women's wrestling focuses squarely on high school association sanctioning. And they aren't going to budge from their standards until arms are twisted. Concerning teamwork, it is my guess when two wrestling programs appear in the same high school, this will become a formidable task for even the best of negotiators. One of two things will occur... either we'll see cooperation or more likely confrontation unless a game plan is instituted before the fact. It is our job as leaders of the sport to put in place rules and procedures that are designed to assure the former. Things such as the equitable distribution of facility use, the establishment of equal and fair salary ranges for both head coaches and budgets that provide each team with similar opportunities for success. Of course there will be many challenges that arise when two wrestling teams call the same school their home. The important thing is the establishment of guidelines and principles that all can use which are developed from a foundation of cooperation. Women's wrestling is on its way and I can tell you you'll enjoy what you see. It's very entertaining and unique. That point becomes clearer each time I watch the ladies. As much as it's the same as what the men do, it's different. It's not an extension of man's oldest sport but an off-spring, something that needs to be nurtured and judged by its own merits. When you do, I'm sure you'll fall in love with it as I have. 🏪

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