

For immediate release, August 10, 2017

USA Wrestling helps lead strong coalition pursuing NCAA Emerging Sports Status for women's wrestling

USA Wrestling is proud to help lead a coalition of major wrestling organizations which worked together to submit a proposal to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) seeking Emerging Sports Status for women's wrestling.

Working side-by-side with the U.S. Olympic Committee, Wrestle Like A Girl, the National Wrestling Coaches Association and the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, USA Wrestling helped develop a comprehensive proposal document which was submitted to the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics on August 1.

This proposal will be presented to the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics in its September 2017 meeting. The committee is chaired by Sherika Montgomery, Associate Director of Athletics for Winthrop University. This is the first step in a process in which the coalition of wrestling organizations hope results in women's wrestling receiving official Emerging Sports Status within the NCAA.

"This is very similar to 2002, when USA Wrestling formally worked with partner organizations to successfully encourage the International Olympic Committee to add women's wrestling to the Olympic Games. We are pleased that these leading organizations have come together to launch this exciting application process according to NCAA procedures," said USA Wrestling Executive Director Rich Bender.

College wrestling for women is not new in the United States, with almost a quarter century of history on college campuses. The first women's varsity team was the University of Minnesota-Morris, which was formed in 1993-94. There have been 14 years of college national women's championships, starting in 2004 with the first event at Missouri Valley College. The women's college wrestling community formed the Women's Collegiate Wrestling Association (WCWA) in 2008, which has hosted national championships ever since. Currently, there are 36 college programs which will compete in the WCWA in the upcoming season, including institutions from the NCAA, the NAIA and the NJCAA.

Although seeking Emerging Sports Status with the NCAA has been discussed for a number of years, it became apparent to wrestling leadership over a year ago that women's wrestling had grown to the point where it met the requirements to apply for this important recognition. A committee organized by USA Wrestling leader Kyra Barry, the 2013-16 U.S. Women's Team Leader, held a number of organization and strategy conference calls to initiate the development of the application document.

The writing and design of the NCAA Emerging Sports Status Proposal for women's wrestling was managed by USA Wrestling Director of Communications Gary Abbott. A complete 23-page document, containing the history of women's wrestling in the United States and the formal plan for NCAA women's wrestling, was developed during the spring and summer of 2017.

In order to achieve Emerging Sports Status designation, an application must meet a specific set of standards determined by the NCAA. Spearheading the collection of the required support letters and institutional financial information were Sally Roberts of Wrestle Like A Girl and Sarah Wilhelm of the U.S. Olympic Committee. All

information were Sally Roberts of *Wrestle Like A Girl* and Sarah Wilhelm of the U.S. Olympic Committee. All of the coalition organizations had input in the process which led to the completed document.

There was a requirement of 10 letters from NCAA institutions which either sponsor women's wrestling or plan to do so after Emerging Sports Status is achieved. These support letters were supplied by Adrian College, Averett University, Emmanuel College, Ferrum College, King University, MacMurray College, McKendree University, Pacific University, Simon Fraser University and Westminster College.

Additional support letters from the coalition organizations were added, plus additional letters from Arizona State Athletics and the University of Iowa Wrestling program.

The proposal provides a plan to use freestyle wrestling, the international style for women, for NCAA women's competition. Freestyle is the style which has traditionally been used in women's college wrestling, including all WCWA competitions. The proposal also calls for NCAA women's college wrestling to be a Fall Semester sport, with a proposed NCAA women's wrestling championships during the third week of December. It is proposed to have 10 weight classes, the same number as men's wrestling, but to use the international weight classes which will be instituted by United World Wrestling for women for the 2018 year.

The meeting of the NCAA Committee on Women's Athletics is the first step of a process that could ultimately lead to approval of women's wrestling as a Women's Emerging Sport in the NCAA. All of the coalition members have made a commitment to participate actively as it works its way through the NCAA decision process.

The coalition is also supportive of seeking official status for women's wrestling in the other college sports organizations including the NAIA and the NJCAA. There will also be an effort to encourage college conferences to recognize women's wrestling as an official conference sport.

"Women's wrestling continues to be a foundational program within USA Wrestling. We are excited with the prospect of women's wrestling securing Emerging Sport Status from the NCAA. We are confident that this will become another springboard to further grow women's wrestling at all levels. USA Wrestling is also actively involved in the grassroots effort to expand the number of states which offer girls wrestling as an official sport at the high school level. It is an exciting time for women's wrestling in our nation," said Bender.