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2-time U.S. Olympian Ali (Bernard) Spencer named new Augsburg women's wrestling head coach
<https://athletics.augsburg.edu/news/2023/7/18/wwr071823.aspx>

MINNEAPOLIS -- Ali (Bernard) Sprenger, a two-time Olympian and five-time collegiate national champion in her women's wrestling career, has been named as the new head coach for the Augsburg University women's wrestling team, it was announced on Tuesday.

Sprenger replaces Jake Short, who resigned to pursue other interests after spending two seasons as the program's head coach. Short coached the Auggies to finishes of sixth place and fifth place in the National Collegiate Women's Wrestling Championships, with three national champions, nine All-Americans and a 14-4 dual-meet record in his two seasons.

"I am incredibly grateful and excited to start this new chapter in my career as head coach of the women's wrestling program," Sprenger said. "The wrestling program here at Augsburg has a rich history, and I am honored to be a part of it."

A native of New Ulm, Minn., Sprenger (nee Bernard) competed in women's wrestling at the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing, China, finishing in fifth place in the 72-kilogram (158.5-pound) weight class. She won a bronze medal at 72 kg at the 2011 FILA World Championships, and also competed at the 2012 Summer Olympics in London, England, finishing in a tie for 13th place in the 72 kg class.

She claimed Junior World Championship titles in 2003 and 2005, and won a championship at the 2010 FISU World University Games. She won U.S. Open titles in 2004, 2008 and 2011, while finishing second in 2005 and third in 2006. She also won multiple national titles in the junior and cadet ranks.

"We are excited to have Ali join the Augsburg family as our new women's wrestling coach," said Augsburg Athletic Director Jeff Swenson '79. "She is a trailblazer in women's wrestling and has had an incredible career. She brings a tremendous amount of experience, and she is a proven leader. We look forward to seeing her efforts to grow our women's wrestling program."

Sprenger competed collegiately in Canada, where she won five U Sports (formerly Canadian Interuniversity Sport) national championships -- four titles (2005-08) at the University of Regina (Saskatchewan) and the 2010 title at the University of Alberta. She was a five-time Canada West Conference champion, earning the conference's and CIS Rookie of the Year awards in 2005 and the Canada West Most Outstanding Wrestler award in 2007. She was named the University of Regina's Female Athlete of the Year three times (2005, 2006, 2007). Sprenger was named to the Canada West Hall of Fame in 2020, and was inducted into the ISD 88 (New Ulm) High School Hall of Fame in 2021.

She served for four seasons (2009-13) as a wrestling assistant coach at the University of Alberta, where she was part of the 2011 women's team national championship, two Canada West women's titles and one Canada West men's title.

In recent years, Sprenger has been active in leadership for Minnesota-USA Wrestling, serving as Women's and Girls' Assistant Director from 2013-14, as the organization's Vice President in 2020-21, and as Women's and Girls' Wrestling Director from 2021 to the present. As Women's and Girls' Wrestling Director, Sprenger coaches the Minnesota-USA Wrestling girls' national team, and led the organization of the Women's and Girls' Wrestling division.

Sprenger earned her bachelor's degree in recreation, sport and tourism from the University of Alberta in 2011. She earned Academic All-Canadian honors at Alberta in 2011. She has worked in the business sector for Best Buy in the Twin Cities since 2016, most recently as a senior specialist of sales enablement. Sprenger lives in Shakopee, Minn.

"My goal for the Augsburg program is to help build a strong women's wrestling community, win championships, and empower the student-athletes to be leaders on and off the wrestling mat," Sprenger said.

Augsburg is entering its fifth season of intercollegiate women's wrestling in 2023-24. The Auggies have finished in the top 10 in the NCWWC national meet each of its first four campaigns, finishing in fifth place with five All-Americans and two national titlists in the 2022-23 season.

Women's wrestling has been an NCAA Emerging Sport for Women since 2020, with a goal of the sport reaching championship status soon. In March, the NCWWC announced that 43 NCAA teams have reached divisional bylaw goals, eclipsing the 40-team plateau for championship status. The American Women's Wrestling website reports that 68 NCAA schools currently have, or are in the process of starting, women's wrestling programs.

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Don Stoner - Sports Information Director