

AAU's women's growth displayed in Iowa and Nebraska

By Kyle Klingman

Women, by any measure, have advanced the entire sport of wrestling. In 2013, when the sport was nearly dropped from the Olympics, it was women that saved the day. The International Olympic Committee wanted gender balance and the international wrestling community took notice.

Now it's the Amateur Athletic Union's turn to step up its women's wrestling game.

The AAU is taking important steps to ensure that girls have sanctioned wrestling at all levels. Some states offer sanctioned girls wrestling in high school, but for those states that don't, the AAU is filling the gap.

Tradition-rich wrestling states like Iowa and Nebraska do not have girls' high school wrestling sanctioned by their respective athletic associations. However, this year's AAU state wrestling tournament will be called the girls state wrestling tournament until the high school associations have their own. Any female who wins the AAU state tournament will be considered a state wrestling champion.

"In Nebraska they're voting on (sanctioning women's wrestling)," said Robert Pilcher, AAU duals director in Nebraska and national co-director for women's wrestling. "It's something they want to do but we're waiting on support. This year, Nebraska had about seven or eight high school tournaments that had a girls' division. Last year there were two tournaments.

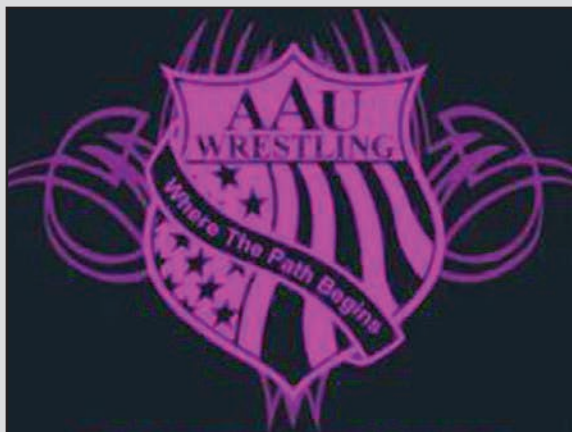
"How do we add girls to tournaments? The answer is simple. Just do it... It just needs continued and complete support." — Jason Loyd, AAU Co-Director for Women's Wrestling

"Iowa has quadrupled the girls we have wrestling just because of population and size. They're even closer to that than we are. I'd say Iowa is two years away (from sanctioned high school wrestling) and I'd say Nebraska is about three. We're hoping to push it to two."

"We're calling this year's state tournament for the AAU the girls state tournament until the high school association has its own. We're pushing that on our end."

In Iowa, AAU is a main feeder to the high school programs. They have about 9,000 members total. Most of the AAU clubs are school-based clubs, which are feeder programs to high schools in the state.

Adding women's wrestling caused a chain reaction. There were only a few women's events last year and this year there were multiple events on the same day. Hopefully that translates into high school wrestling in Iowa and Nebraska.



AAU GIRL'S IOWA STATE CHAMPIONSHIP



The AAU in Iowa and Nebraska are two states leading the way in providing opportunities for girls state tournaments before the official state associations sanction a state championship.

The AAU didn't stop there, either. Pilcher is on the executive board for the Disney Duals. He asked his board why there wasn't a girls division. Their response was, "Great idea. Run with it."

Pilcher and Jason Loyd, also national co-director for women's wrestling, contacted states from all over the country to participate in the girls division. The first women's division will take place at the Disney Duals in Orlando alongside the men in Orlando, Florida, on June 23-28.

Every national AAU event will include girls, including Disney Duals, Winter Nationals in Nebraska and Spring Nationals in Tennessee. The AAU currently has 2,000 female participants nationally.

"This is the first step for us to grow it nationally," said Loyd. "We're looking to give women's wrestling more

opportunities at a national level. How do we add girls to tournaments? The answer is simple. Just do it. No matter the numbers, women's wrestling will grow. It just needs continued and complete support.

"Growth comes with opportunity. Give women a state and support system and the girls will explode like no one would believe."

Women's involvement in wrestling continues to be a path for sustainability in a sport that was once solely driven by male participation. The more women that participate, the stronger the sport will be.

There already are some states that have women's wrestling. Texas is going to bring two or three teams.

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