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KISMET AREA

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DISTRICT #7

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

The sport of wrestling has undergone many, many changes over just the past several years. These changes come in the form of rule changes, the ability to watch matches anywhere, the growing popularity of girl's wrestling, and the promotion of wrestling to younger children. I love the sport of wrestling and I believe that these changes will improve wrestling. Wrestling is a very impactful sport that can change the lives of those that participate in it either as a wrestler or coach. But it also impacts the spectators and younger kids that look up to the older wrestlers and coaches.

There have been plenty of rule changes over the past several years to make the sport more exciting. There have been many rule changes to freestyle wrestling, especially after wrestling was almost removed from the Olympic games. These rule changes have sparked a new style of wrestling that includes higher scoring matches, and much less standing around and hand fighting. College wrestling has also seen some rules change the landscape of the sport as well. The NCAA has done a great job to get their wrestlers more active while wrestling, by putting a point of emphasis on the stalling calls and wrestlers continuing to work while wrestling on the edge of the mat to avoid stall calls. High school wrestling has mirrored some rule changes in the NCAA by way of a change in the out-of-bounds rule recently. A way we can continue to increase viewership and popularity of the sport through some rule changes could be a possible change with the high school out of bounds rule and an increase in stalling calls to provide action for the fans. Changing the rule to any point of contact remaining in-bounds would result in the match continuing. This would increase action and also eliminate confusion for fans on how many points of contact need to remain in-bounds.

Next, wrestling must continue to grow its popularity by promoting the increased availability to watch college or international wrestling through the Internet or streaming services. Many colleges now offer broadcasts of almost all of their matches through streaming sites such as ESPN and Flowrestling. These sites allow parents and relatives of wrestlers that could not make the trip to watch them, to still root on their favorite wrestler. Social media has also allowed wrestling fans to watch some crazy moves, or get access to their favorite coaches and wrestlers. Social media also allows for fans to "connect" off of the mat with the wrestlers that they love to follow. ESPN does a great job of broadcasting the NCAA championships every year, and it has undoubtedly given the sport a greater spotlight. If more college wrestling matches are televised on a regular basis, more people would go out for the sport of wrestling. This year our local newspaper had commentators and cameras everywhere for a few of our matches and it helped create an awesome atmosphere for the fans and wrestlers. Another way to improve wrestling in high schools is to have pep rallies during the school day before the wrestling matches, so more fans come



out to support the teams. Some athletes will go out for the sport of wrestling if it becomes more popular with the student population. I think the wrestling team and coaches should promote theme nights like "white-outs" for the home matches, also. Creating an exciting atmosphere for high school wrestling through broadcasting matches and having student sections can create special moments for the wrestlers and fans.

One of the most exciting things to see is the growth in the numbers of girls participating in wrestling. I believe that this is helping our sport grow immensely. Several states now have state championships for girls and they are also competing in the Olympics as well. The Pittsburgh Wrestling Classic kicked off the competition with a freestyle match between two of the best girls in the nation. It was one of the best matches of the night! Our Junior High wrestling team had its very first girl in the lineup and she battled and was fearless in all of her matches this year. I believe that if we can increase the number of girls in our sport that it will help teams become more competitive and fill out the rosters.

An extremely important aspect in improving wrestling is spreading this great sport to the next generation of wrestlers. Many schools, especially the smaller schools, are having a hard time filling a full lineup in a high school dual match nowadays, and this is a big problem. A forfeit is not what people want to see when they come out to watch high school wrestling matches. They come out to watch fourteen action-packed matches. Therefore, people are much less likely to go pay to watch a match with multiple forfeits. A solution to this problem is high school wrestlers promoting the sport they love to the next generation of wrestlers. My high school program does a great job of creating good publicity in the community and also doing some creative things to help bring in kids that want to wrestle. In the summer of 2018, a few of my teammates and I constructed a handicap swing set at a local community park. This project was a help to the community and it also brought on some good publicity to our program. Newspaper articles and interviews of wrestlers can keep the community in the loop as to what you and your teammates are accomplishing throughout the season. Our high school team also does this tour around the elementary schools before we depart for PIAA State Championship Team Tournament. While on this trip, we show the little kids our trophies and medals, and also tell them the benefits of our great sport. These kids are in awe of the many trophies we have, and just going around to these schools for just a short time has such a huge impact on our program. We also have an annual junior night during one of our home matches, in which the youth wrestlers are recognized before our match. After this match they all come onto the mat and we sign their shirts like we are professional athletes. These kids look up to us like we are the Pittsburgh Steelers, and it also motivates them to be in our shoes one day. The numbers in our junior program have risen as a result of these pep assemblies and junior nights, and they are just some ideas that some other high school programs could look into to increase support for wrestling in their school district.

In conclusion, although wrestling may not be among the most popularly watched sports, the increase in appreciation and popularity of the sport has definitely increased over the past couple of years. We can even take the recent improvements of this sport much further by implementing a few rules changes to eliminate some confusion and increase action at the high school level, continuing to grow the sport through social media and streaming

sites, and promoting the sport to the next generation of young wrestlers. The impact of wrestling on one's life is like no other sport, whether you're a fan, coach, or wrestler, you will find that you are an all-around better person after wrestling has become a part of your life.