

How can we improve the sport of wrestling?

Because wrestling is my favorite sport, my first thought is not much needs to be improved. It is a sport that teaches its participants many things. Qualities like discipline, perseverance, and teamwork are developed. Wrestlers learn early on that there is always room for improvement, but hard work pays off. Despite its strengths, the sport of wrestling will only continue if wrestlers and their families are able and willing to participate.

At the youth level, my parents recognized early on that I disliked long, crowded tournaments and back then limited me to one or two a year. Though all kids are different, they suspected that I might burn out if forced to spend every weekend from November through March on the mat, and my wrestling may not have lasted to high school or beyond. Streamlining tournaments where fewer wrestlers or schools participate may be a way to keep families coming. I have heard of a format where elementary kids are assigned three matches in a morning with kids of similar experience and by noon leave with a participation t-shirt instead of a trophy. It might take some guidance for this to become a mainstream idea because many booster organizations seem to rely on ticket and food sales at extended events. However, shortening the time commitment and lessening the cost associated with participation might open the sport up to more kids whose parents work weekends, who have limited resources, or who have children participating in multiple activities.

Novice tournaments are beneficial for kids to experience success. Additionally, shifting from long competitions to a clinic format, at least for younger wrestlers, may be another way to improve things. Another idea to consider is when wrestlers have down time during tournaments, parents and kids could go to sessions on health and nutrition, sportsmanship, or the importance of keeping grades up.