

# 500

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Wrestling is one of the oldest sports known to mankind. The sport has evolved tremendously over time. From Greco-Roman and freestyle came our version, folkstyle. As time continues, we must continue to evolve the sport, to grow the sport. Numbers across each region in Pennsylvania are down. I can see the problem in my own high school.

As I was growing up, my high school had a team that was always competitive in the district and conference. As time went on, the numbers of athletes on the team decreased dramatically. I was a freshman when I was on my largest wrestling team. We had twelve people on the team, out of fourteen weight classes. The following season, we had ten wrestlers. My junior year, we had eight. For my senior season, we only had five wrestlers come out for the team. This seems to be the case with a lot of other schools in the state as well. Another team in my district for instance only had two competitors this year. The sport needs numbers. We need recruitment. We, as a sport, need to get kids into the sport early on, without burning them out. Our elementary program at my school has phenomenal numbers, but we lose them as they go through middle school and high school. I believe too many kids are being pushed too hard to win, not just to have fun. After all, people always say, "just go out there and have fun." We need to encourage this. Personally, I would always wrestle better if someone told me just to have fun. When I concentrate on being loose and having fun, I find myself being more aggressive, scrambling with my opponent rather than playing straight defense. Having fun in the sport is essential, but people will argue that so many other things in life are fun, too. I totally agree with that. But the main question I want to ask our younger wrestlers is: sure, video games are fun, but what life skills will they give you that will help your future? Wrestling gives you so much more than you realize, and can be fun at the same time. It implements a steady workout routine

to keep in shape, it teaches a proper work ethic that can be translated to anything in life, and also very importantly, it builds immense social skills. Wrestling has given me so many bonds with other people it is almost hard to explain. Sure, kids could sit and talk to their friends through a gaming headset all day, but there is no personal connection. Wrestling will help build those personal, literal face-to-face connections. Right now in America, lack of social skills is a massive problem. Getting people onto the mats helps build that skill and helps establish the necessary trait that so many kids lack today. To obtain these large numbers for teams, we need to encourage having fun in the sport. We need to stop worrying about pushing kids so hard at a young age and just encourage them to just go out and let it fly.

I don't think a lack of interest or attention in the sport is the problem in Pennsylvania. I constantly have buddies of mine ask me to teach them about wrestling, even if they are a basketball player. I find myself watching a tournament on FloWrestling and see my friends, non-wrestlers, looking over my shoulder, commenting on a crazy scramble, or just the stacked muscles of the athlete. But a lot of the times, girls ask me questions about wrestling. If our state, like others, implements a girls' division, I believe we could grow the sport even more.

My mother is the girls' head soccer coach at my school. Every year, she has the team over right before playoffs for a big spaghetti dinner. After they eat, it has been a long tradition for them to do one thing: a wrestling tournament, right in my basement. All of the furniture is moved out of the way, brackets are drawn, and all hell breaks loose. I tend to lock myself in my room, to stay away from the loud shrieks of the teenage girls, but I always see videos of them scrapping and scrambling on social media. But why can't we make this a reality for them? Only two girls on the entire soccer team are basketball players, the rest of them don't do anything in

the winter. If a girls' wrestling division were implemented in our state, I firmly believe many of those girls would go out for the sport, to do something they enjoy.

Like I said, lack of attention isn't the problem our sport has, I think it is lack of education. Too many kids start young and stop, forgetting everything when they grow up. People are interested in the sport, but their interest is coming too late, at a time when they are too far behind in the "match" to compete. Winning is becoming too important, too. We need to tell our young wrestlers to put their focus on having fun and letting it fly rather than always winning. Additionally, so many local girls are not getting onto the basketball court and not doing anything with their time. I have witnessed firsthand that at least twenty girls from my school alone, love wrestling. If we could turn this into reality for those girls, we can grow the sport for them, and for the rest of the state and country as well.