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

Wrestling is not only a sport, it can easily become someone's lifestyle. Not everyone that tries wrestling falls in love with it. Not everyone is cut out for the grueling ups and downs that come with it; but those who fall in love with the sport, find themselves thinking about why and how the sport captures their mind for so many hours of the day and how we can make it even better. Many times, I wonder what I can do to help promote and encourage the sport of wrestling. I know the lessons that the sport has taught me, and I am sure of the fact that it can teach others those same important lessons, not only about wrestling, but about life.

Let's talk about numbers. When schools are building wrestling programs all across the state, you hear coaches talking about their numbers. One thing that is usually common about them, is that they have junior varsity or backup wrestlers on the team. While this is most certainly good for the competition within the sport, at the same time, these wrestlers that are not making the starting lineup, do not get time to showcase the skills that they have developed throughout the season. I know that in my school there are cases in which kids are discouraged from coming out because they know there is a "veteran" wrestler at their weight class. They feel they have no shot at making the starting lineup. This is where that competition does not serve its purpose. Yes, some backup wrestlers do get JV matches at dual meets and tournaments, but for

most, it still isn't enough to satisfy someone's hunger for more, especially beginners that are trying to get a feel for the sport. The lack of competition limits the learning possibilities of these wrestlers. So the best way I think we can improve this, is to let teams enter more than one wrestler in a weight class at tournaments. Now, I would suggest that only your starting wrestler's points count in the team race, but at the same time, your backup wrestlers are getting a chance to go out and compete. This is where those wrestlers can see the improvements they have made over the course of time. Otherwise, they are stuck in their school wrestling room, vying for a starting spot, wondering if practice is a waste of time since they don't get the chance to compete or wondering if they will ever attain a starting spot.

Another way to improve the sport, would be to change the rules of high school wrestling to match those of the NCAA. The out of bounds rules and the riding time are all things things would help improve our sport. Riding time rewards a wrestler for controlling his/her opponent, which is something that is not always rewarded throughout the course of a match. A wrestler can get a takedown in the first period, and be ridden for the last two full periods and be victorious by a 2-0 score. Although he was dominated the last two periods, he still won by two points. Riding time would have made the score 2-1, so the outcome would have been the same, but through the course of a match, it can lead to more scoring opportunities.

The last thing we can do to improve wrestling, is to remember it's true purpose. It's very unfortunate that I have witnessed parents and coaches yelling and discouraging their kids after giving up a takedown or losing a well-fought match. This is not what the

sport of wrestling represents. Wrestling is about learning, making friends, creating memories, and most of all having fun. This is especially true at the elementary level. Play games at practice, learn new technique, let the coaches coach, and let the kids learn and develop a feel for the sport, rather than badger them for everything they do wrong. This then goes on to help the numbers aspect I brought up earlier, as less kids will be "burnt out" or tired of the constant pressure placed upon them. The more we can grow the sport the better.

In conclusion, the sport can teach young men and women about more than just wrestling, but about important life lessons. Through wrestling, I have learned to be disciplined, hard working, and how to push through adversity, These are valuable lessons that should be understood before entering the real world. And trust me from experience, there is nothing in the world that can better prepare you for life than the sport of wrestling.