



September 2016

Separation of men's and women's wrestling programs;

Simon Fraser University wrestling at the prompting of a (Women's sport promotional group), was the first University program to bring a women's division to our annual International tournament. We invited and funded teams from USA (mostly Judo kids) Venezuela, and Japan to bring teams into the event. We invited local teachers and coaches from schools to the event. Although the caliber of competition was not outstanding at this stage of development the event did change the perception of women moving into the non- traditional sport played predominantly by men. Up to this point many had concerns about differentials in strength as well as the contact between girls and boys at a time in development when they were experiencing many physiological changes. Most if not all of these concerns disappeared when they viewed women competing against women.

Many of the coaches and teachers in attendance went back to their schools and offered the option to girls that were interested in trying the sport. This was a time when our government sporting organizations were also pushing for a substantial increase in opportunities in sport for our young women. We lacked legislated methods like the (Title IX initiatives) implemented in the United States but Government funding grants started basing their allocations of support based on numbers of participants in both genders. Wrestling decided the quickest way to build numbers and interest was to add a women's division to every existing event on their calendar. In the beginning many times we made up the weights from those that entered. The statement (if you offer it they will come) proved to in fact be the case! We quickly grew to a position where we had a full complement of weight division that supported full brackets.

Within a couple years those graduating from high school programs began to show up at our University programs. Not having gender policies they were welcomed to our teams. We did train together although we competed in women divisions tournaments and did promotional matches at men's events.

The Canadian University league quickly adopted the women varsity program and made it a national championship. The USA started the WCWA organization and Simon Fraser enjoyed competing in both leagues. Wcwa decided early on to compete under the International freestyle rules rather than the USA folkstyle rules. Although I am not a great supporter of moving women's high school wrestling away from folk style. The move to freestyle provided another separation of the women's side of the sport from the more established men's side of the sport! For those that had a chance to watch this year's Olympics in Rio, I think the fact women's wrestling is here to stay is indisputable. Our task then becomes to help grow the sport and provide an opportunity to as many young women that might find the sport intriguing and challenging! To steal a line from one of my graduates Helen Maroulis," the values of participation in

wrestling are just too great to waste them only on men". The practice of allowing girls to turn out for the boys wrestling team was a popular way to deal with the interest in young women wrestling on school teams. Although a possible answer to the requests to have options for women to wrestle, and in fact how a few very outstanding women have developed in the last few years, this answer was basically meant to deter the growth of the sport as many administrators and parents were legitimately concerned about safety and health issues. Existing programs and coaches were not completely wrong when they surmised that there would not quickly be new resources committed to the growth of the women's side of the sport. This naturally created more resistance. In this area, Canada was in a much healthier climate and in the fact adding women actually increased our ability to access funding. The growth of the sport and the number of young girls exposed jumped dramatically in those regions that chose to run separate competitions. Although it is still possible to share facilities, practice times, and even coaches eventually growth will lead to more separation of the two genders. For us adding women has strengthened the sport in general. Although our men do compete in the NCAA and thus the USA folk style the majority of wrestling here is under freestyle rules so there is really no discussion necessary on what style we should employ at the high school level. I have heard this conversation with US based coaches with some feeling the women sport would grow faster if they continued folk style at the university level while others campaign for changing high school programs to freestyle. Although happy I do not have to deal with the issue, I would weigh in on keeping high school wrestling based on folk style rules. First it is good for the development of the young wrestlers but mostly there are many more coaches that feel comfortable mentoring in this style! The conversion to freestyle is really quite easy for those moving on to University.

Sincerely,

Mike R. Jones

Simon Fraser University

