



## **Coalition leaders react to NCAA announcement that women’s wrestling is “on track for championship consideration”**

23 OCTOBER 2023 – WASHINGTON, DC - A major milestone for women’s wrestling was achieved this past week, with the announcement from the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) that women’s wrestling is “on track for championship consideration.”

Women’s wrestling is currently one of six sports in the NCAA Emerging Sports for Women program, along with acrobatics and tumbling, equestrian, rugby, stunt and triathlon. From this group, wrestling became the most recent to meet the requirements to be considered for an NCAA Championship.

In a press release update about the Emerging Sports for Women program, the NCAA announced that “women's wrestling is on track to become the NCAA's 91st NCAA championship, based on the latest sports sponsorship data released this month.”

Women’s wrestling reached a major milestone when “more than 40 schools sponsored women's wrestling at the varsity level and met the sport's minimum competition and participant requirements in the 2022-23 academic year,” according to the NCAA release.

In 2017, a coalition of wrestling organizations made its initial application to the NCAA’s Committee on Women’s Athletics for Emerging Sport Status. The coalition updated its application in 2018, which then moved forward through the NCAA process. In 2020, all three divisions of the NCAA (Div. I, Div. II and Div. III) approved women’s wrestling as an NCAA Emerging Sport for Women.

Leaders from the wrestling organization in the women’s wrestling coalition that made the application and guided the sport through the NCAA process, have provided their comments about the sport now moving forward toward an official NCAA Championships.



**Rich Bender, Executive Director, USA Wrestling**

"This is wonderful news for women's wrestling in America, the culmination of years of tireless efforts by many to provide the platform for women to wrestle on college's highest stage. The best is yet to come for women's wrestling in the United States."

**Sally Roberts, Founder and CEO, Wrestle Like A Girl**

"This NCAA announcement is a landmark for women's wrestling, signaling a transformative era for the sport. Through the combined advocacy by numerous partners at the high school and collegiate level, we've seen transformative growth in the number of girls and women participating in wrestling. This isn't just about wrestling; it's about creating expanded opportunities for young women, especially from first-generation college families, to pursue higher education and leadership roles. As we celebrate this milestone, our sights are set on the boundless potential and future of these emerging leaders in the sport."

**Mike Moyer, Executive Director, National Wrestling Coaches Association**

"On behalf of the NWCA Board of Directors and our President, Coach Tony Ersland, we want to extend a heartfelt thanks to the NCAA and our coalition partners for their tireless efforts to secure NCAA Championship Status for women's wrestling. This NCAA announcement represents a giant step forward in providing a sanctioned championship for very deserving women wrestlers."

**Lee Roy Smith, Executive Director, National Wrestling Hall of Fame,**

"The National Wrestling Hall of Fame is encouraged for the pioneering impact women will experience with a NCAA Wrestling Championship of their own. Such opportunities at the collegiate level are sure to spur additional growth in youth wrestling across the USA and for our sport's success in Olympic and World competition."

The NCAA confirmed, that should women's wrestling progress through the approval process moving forward, the first NCAA Women's Wrestling Championships could be held as early as the winter of 2026. The Committee on Women's Athletics anticipates making a recommendation to Divisions I, II and III to sponsor legislation to add a national collegiate women's wrestling championship during its February 2024 meeting. If this recommendation is made, the projected timeline to add a women's wrestling championship is for each division to sponsor a proposal for the 2024-25 legislative cycle and vote on the proposals at the 2025



NCAA Convention. This timeline is consistent with past sports added as national collegiate championships through the Emerging Sports for Women program.

According to the NCAA announcement, women's wrestling's growth "puts it on track to become the sixth sport to earn NCAA championship status through the Emerging Sports for Women program, joining rowing (1996), ice hockey (2000), water polo (2000), bowling (2003) and beach volleyball (2015)."

Read the complete NCAA announcement below:

Emerging Sports for Women update: Women's wrestling on track for championship consideration

<https://www.ncaa.org/news/2023/10/17/media-center-emerging-sports-for-women-update-womens-wrestling-on-track-for-championship-consideration.aspx>

In its update on the six Emerging Sports, the NCAA reported the status of women's wrestling for the 2022-23 academic year:

Women's wrestling

2022-23: 51 teams reported sponsoring women's wrestling, a 12-school uptick from 2021-22. Division III accounted for 30 schools in the 2022-23 sponsorship data, followed by 19 in Division II and two in Division I.

Average roster size: 15.

Season of competition Winter.

The women's wrestling coalition is proud to announce that women's wrestling continues its amazing growth at the NCAA level. There are 96 NCAA athletic departments which currently have a women's wrestling varsity program or have announced that they are in the process of creating a women's wrestling varsity team that will begin competition in the near future.



Wrestling for girls and women continues to grow rapidly across the nation and around the world. Women's wrestling became a sport on the Olympic program in 2004. At the college level, the National Association for Intercollegiate Athletics (NAIA) has created an official national championships in women's wrestling and the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA) held its first women's wrestling tournament in 2023. There are currently 44 state high school associations which conduct a women's state high school competition. USA Wrestling reports record annual growth in its female athlete membership at all levels.