



CASE FOR SUPPORT



“PERSEVERANCE, RESILIENCE, CONFIDENCE - THESE THREE CHARACTER-DEFINING ATTRIBUTES ARE SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS THAT WRESTLING HAS FORTIFIED WITHIN ME. WRESTLE LIKE A GIRL IS A PLACE WHERE GIRLS AND WOMEN ARE INTRODUCED TO THE SPORT IN A SAFE, POSITIVE, AND EMPOWERING WAY. AS IMPORTANTLY, WRESTLE LIKE A GIRL CREATES OPPORTUNITY AND ENCOURAGES GIRLS AND WOMEN TO USE THEIR VOICE AND OWN THEIR SPACE, WHICH WHEN COMBINED WITH PERSEVERANCE, RESILIENCE, AND CONFIDENCE, DEVELOPS STRONG LEADERS. I’M PROUD TO REPRESENT WRESTLE LIKE A GIRL.”

**HELEN MAROULIS
OLYMPIC CHAMPION, 3-TIME WORLD CHAMPION, WLAG AMBASSADOR**



OUR FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS

The evolution of wrestling for girls and young women, over the last several decades, has made it one of the fastest growing sports in the world.

This is especially visible at the high school level. In 1990, there were fewer than 150 girls participating in high school wrestling. At the beginning of the 2019 academic year, the number of high school girls wrestling exceeded 30,000.

When high school girls are engaged in sports, they are not only more likely to stay in school, but they become better students overall and are less likely to get pregnant at a much too early age (which forces them away from their own education and into the workforce)¹. Approximately 44% of female wrestlers come from diverse backgrounds and underserved communities - a testament that wrestling creates opportunities for the disadvantaged, disenfranchised and marginalized (USA Wrestling 2019 Membership Data). Wrestling promotes inclusion, and advances equality off the mat. Most importantly, wrestling empowers our girls and young women to exude confidence and display poise, determination, and strength of character, and it promotes teamwork. **These young athletes will emerge as our important leaders for tomorrow – active participants, exemplifying commitment and leadership, in all activities and pursuits they undertake.**

But only with your help. We must attack the budget shortfalls, and enlighten and motivate school administrators and key stakeholders to partner with us to increase opportunities for all of these young athletes. Without the monetary resources for quality education, qualified coaches, research and programming, our female wrestling programs will flounder, or worse, never get started. **The last thirty years are a testament that the interest is there but the funding needed to bring these opportunities to fruition is not.**

We want to see more schools sponsor girls wrestling across all levels. We also want to see more NCAA schools support and build varsity teams. There has been a staggering growth in tournaments and competitions on college and university campuses, but challenges persist. Funding shortages that have only increased due to the COVID pandemic have caused collegiate institutions to drop women’s sports instead of adding them, which leads to compounding negative effects for girls and women. When women’s sports are dropped, the athletes do not go elsewhere to train - they simply stop participating in sports all together, losing out on the associated benefits. By continuing to open the sport to more girls who desire to train and compete, we will be developing leaders for life.

The importance of our work at Wrestle Like A Girl (WLAG) could not be more timely as we seek to change the lives of every girl and every woman through the positive impact of wrestling. While we owe a debt to the early trailblazers of the Title IX movement, we also recognize that this advocacy work is not finished. We invite you to learn more about what we do at Wrestle Like A Girl. We invite you to partner with us. And we invite you to be an important part of the transformative power of wrestling for girls – partnering in the creation of our future leaders, today.

Onward for change,

SALLY ROBERTS
FOUNDER AND CEO, WRESTLE LIKE A GIRL
2X WORLD BRONZE MEDALIST & COMBAT VETERAN



HISTORY AND VISION

Our vision is to ensure equal access and opportunities for girls and women in wrestling, worldwide.

In 2015, Wrestle Like A Girl was founded by Sally Roberts, a two-time Senior World bronze medalist in women’s freestyle wrestling and US Army Combat Veteran. In 2016, Sally was awarded the Woman in Sport award by United World Wrestling, the international governing body, and the International Olympic Committee, for her work in developing women’s wrestling. Sally was also recognized as 2018’s Woman of the Year by USA Wrestling, the national governing body for wrestling in the United States, for her contributions to the sport of wrestling.

Wrestling is one of the oldest Olympic sports, first introduced in the ancient Olympic Games in 708 BC. Wrestling was highly regarded among ancient cultures; by the Greeks, as a science and a divine art, and by the Romans, as the beloved and coveted sport of young aristocrats, soldiers, and shepherds. While wrestling has two distinct styles, Greco-Roman and Freestyle, Freestyle wrestling is the more modern of styles and was introduced in the modern Olympic Games in 1904.

From 708 BC through 2004, the glory of wrestling in the Olympics was available only to men. After thousands of years, in 2004 women participated in their inaugural Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, a fitting city for a truly monumental and historic expansion.

Time-tested, Olympic wrestling continues to be beloved and coveted, with girls’ wrestling being one of the fastest growing high school sports in the United States. Wrestling helps build self-confidence and self-esteem, strengthens physical and mental resilience, and teaches one to persevere through adversity to reach their full potential.

Today Wrestle Like A Girl is doing far more than shattering glass ceilings, it is offering girls and women leadership lessons that for centuries upon centuries were only offered to boys and men. Wrestle Like A Girl is leading the charge for equal access and opportunity, and equal enjoyment of the sport of wrestling for girls and women.

PRIORITY AREAS FOR SUPPORT

I. Customized Programming

The Wrestle Like A Girl Leadership Program, launching in 2021, focuses on advancing gender equality by empowering girls and women for leadership positions. The two areas below are the cornerstones of the program:

Empowering Girls through Sports Leadership Program

This program introduces 11th-grade and 12th-grade girl wrestlers to essential leadership skills. Participants receive leadership development training and choose a project that advances gender equality within their communities.

Empowering Women through Sports Leadership Program

This five-month program focuses on empowering international women wrestlers to serve their local communities by increasing access to, and opportunities for, participation in sports. Annually, 4 to 6 participants demonstrating leadership skills and experience in the sports sector are chosen from a list of nominees selected by Washington, D.C. -based Embassies and wrestling governing bodies across the world. These delegates are between 25 and 40 years of age, proficient in English, and have had international wrestling success. As a part of the nomination process, each delegate identifies a key need or challenge facing girls and women in underserved communities in their home country. During the program, delegates develop a detailed action plan to address this challenge through sports. All action plans are designed to be implemented in delegates’ communities. The development of the action plan serves as the culmination of the leadership experience.

II. Stakeholder Education

Female-specific coaching education is paramount as female wrestlers flock to the traditionally male-dominated “space.” Within the last two years alone, high school girls’ wrestling has grown by an incredible 30%. Additionally, higher education is left wanting for female wrestling coaches as the number of college wrestling programs has increased dramatically from ten to over eighty within a decade. Empowering women to take on coaching and other leadership roles is critical to the growth and efficacy of women’s wrestling.

Wrestle Like A Girl develops evidence-informed coaching material unique to female wrestlers through group think tanks made up of the country’s most accomplished coaches of female wrestlers. We identify where coaching girls is similar to coaching boys AND the areas that additional training is necessary to support the female brain, body, and health. Through webinars, clinics, task forces, and our education resources, we have directly engaged thousands of coaches and wrestling leaders. Our partners have included USA Wrestling, British Wrestling, Canada Wrestling, the National Wrestling Coaches Association, the National Federation of State High School Associations, and the Women’s Collegiate Wrestling Association - as well as significant partnerships from a variety of countries including Canada, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Kingdom. Collectively we have extended our reach of wrestling education resources across the national and international wrestling platforms to over 1 million constituents. We fill a void with valuable, informational resources and have built a network to connect thousands of coaches who are pioneering women’s wrestling across the country and throughout the world. There is a need for more education, a need to strengthen and grow the network, and a need to engage more female leaders and aid their development with mentorship. **We need your support to continue this critical work.**



PRIORITY AREAS FOR SUPPORT

III. Determined Advocacy

Scholastic Youth Initiatives. Wrestle Like A Girl has a strong commitment to the growth and development of female wrestling by providing unique opportunities to wrestle at the high school level. Wrestle Like A Girl supports the start-up of new high school wrestling programs and advocates to increase the number of approved girls high school state tournaments across the United States. In 1998, the state of Hawaii was the first to officially recognize girls wrestling, and as of 2020, 28 more states have followed. From the year 2019 through 2020, we witnessed the highest conversion rate of states approving the sport. In these 2 years alone, 12 states have officially recognized the sport for girls, evidence of the exploding appeal to high school girls.

University Initiatives. Wrestle Like A Girl was successful in bringing women's wrestling under the NCAA umbrella as an Emerging Sport in 2020 and intends to use the same targeted approach to bring Women's Wrestling to NCAA Championship Status by 2023.

IV. Critical Research

Research on girls and women in competitive wrestling is limited - largely because boys and men's wrestling were considered a top priority. That trend is now shifting with some reports and research being conducted on female wrestling at the national level and the state of gender equity. Based on a qualitative study conducted by Stanec & Bhalla (2015) there are strong indications that "elite women wrestlers have positive experiences and have the ability to see upward social mobility by participating in the sport." There is an urgent need to further understand the landscape for females. Specifically, who is driving the advancement of the sport, what are the current trends, and who are the powerful influencers who are likely to advance the sport overall. More detailed research must be conducted with a focus on the following: the general outcomes of participation for girls and young women, the personal experiences for those who are young and just starting out in the sport, and the critical trends and impact of the sport at the collegiate and university levels. With this research, the sport can adopt overall best practices for all participants, shape the curriculum and pedagogy of the sport, and influence and drive a positive culture for future athletes and the coaches.

CALL TO ACTION

Your investment in Wrestle Like A Girl is a commitment to increasing access and opportunities for girls and women in wrestling, worldwide. Our work and accomplishments could not be more timely or more critical as we use the mental and physical benefits of the sport of wrestling to build confidence and self-esteem, literally changing the lives of young women. Each and every day, we empower our young girls with the skill set to accomplish all that they desire in life. And our work is far from finished. We will continue to advocate for the growth of girls' wrestling in high school and women's wrestling at the college level - calling specifically on the NCAA to increase critical support and resources. We will continue offering our Empowerment Camps to teach young girls how to build character and better understand the value and importance of hard work, determination, and resilience through many of life's challenges. And we will continue to use our evidence-based research to inspire the next wave of coaches and leaders to open doors for even more young girls and women to benefit from the power of wrestling.

For too long - literally thousands of years - only boys and men were given the ability to participate in the sport. Shattering that glass ceiling is only the beginning of what Wrestle Like A Girl is setting out to accomplish. Through opening wrestling to more girls and women, we will continue to push for equal access, equal opportunities and, of course, equal enjoyment. Join us in our efforts.

For further information on Wrestle Like A Girl and how to make a contribution, please contact:

Sally Roberts | Founder and CEO, Wrestle Like A Girl
E: Sally@wrestlelikeagirl.org | 206-909-2173

"Our Foundation has been a strong supporter of Wrestle Like A Girl from its beginning. Many girls and women would enjoy wrestling similar to their male counterparts if only given the opportunity. Until recently, such opportunities have been limited due to inertia and lack of information in the athletic community about the sport. This is changing with organizations such as Wrestle Like A Girl that are bringing more female athletes to the rapidly growing sport. Wrestle Like A Girl introduces and inspires young female athletes to consider wrestling as well as lobby, educate and persuade administrators to recognize the sport in their state and local communities and schools. When you empower girls and women with enriched experiences like this, through a grueling physical activity, you build confidence, strength and character - great qualities young women will carry with them for a lifetime."

James and Amy Bennett Foundation

"IT'S TIME WE ALL UP OUR GAME WITH THE GREATEST OF URGENCY AND INTENT, DOING EVERYTHING WE CAN TO TAKE DOWN WALLS, BREAK THROUGH CEILINGS AND SHIFT PARADIGMS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN AROUND THE WORLD, AFFORDING THEM THE OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS ASSOCIATED WITH THE GREAT AND ANCIENT SPORT OF WRESTLING. BY DOING THIS, WE BUILD A FOUNDATION FOR THE EMERGENCE OF SOME OF THE GREATEST LEADERS OF A KIND WE HAVE NEVER SEEN BEFORE."

**DAVID GREVEMBERG, CBE
FOUNDING CHAIR, WRESTLE LIKE A GIRL
CEO, COMMONWEALTH GAMES FEDERATION**



1629 K Street NW, Suite 300 | Washington, DC 20006
T: (435) 901-7602



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