

Sports

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Coach Smith-Foot: Ten reasons your child should consider wrestling

By Michael Smith-Foot
North Georgia News
Sports Special

Ten years ago, I came home to Union County to start a wrestling program alongside some men I truly respected. The program has seen growth each year and continues to march toward being one of the better programs in the state of Georgia, and eventually a State Championship.

Union County wrestling has grown into actually four different programs. We have a youth program that usually operates between 20-40 members each year and runs three days a week for nine months of the year.

The middle school program normally contains 30-40 wrestlers and runs for about four months a year. For the last three years, we have had more wrestlers than any other sports program at our school, including football. The high school program functions with 20-30 wrestlers each year. The last two years we have finished in the top 15 in state with three state placers at this year's state tournament.

For the last three years, we have had athletes continue their wrestling at the collegiate level as well. Union County Wrestling also runs a Women's division between 10-20 athletes at all different levels. This year we had our first female state placer at the state tournament as well.

Another success story for our program has been the addition of several extremely active parents that have grown our USA/AAU development program.

These dedicated parents do everything from taking athletes to State and National Tournaments, to organizing trips to advanced practices and camps. Several of these trips have been to Ohio, Florida, Virginia, and South Carolina.

Here are 10 reasons why you should consider encouraging your son or daughter to compete in wrestling.

1. Wrestling develops a well-rounded athlete that can be more successful in other sports.

To be a wrestler, you have to develop the entire athlete. You need to be strong, flexible, have endurance, mental toughness and be smart. Many wrestlers can transfer what they learned on the mat and turn it into success in other sports: football, baseball, track, soccer, cross country and band. Several of my previ-



Union County wrestling coach Michael Smith-Foot (far right) along with coach Justin Byers (far left) and wrestlers from UCHS' Class of 2022. Seniors Brady Guild (third from left) and Sean Philips (second from right) each took home an individual region title in February, doubling-up the 2021 total when then-senior Eli Smith-Foot claimed the program's first-ever region title. Photo/Todd Forrest

a sharp edge.

5. Wrestling teaches nutrition and weight maintenance.

The CDC states that over 42% of the American population is obese (at least 20-30 pounds over weight). For many people, this struggle starts in school. Over 25% of children are already considered obese. Wrestling teaches you about making healthy choices. Eating an apple instead of cake. Drinking water instead of Coke. The better you eat, the more energy you have and the better you will perform.

6. Wrestling builds friendships and camaraderie.

Even though wrestling develops personal responsibility, you learn very quickly that having a teammate you can trust makes the journey manageable. Adversity brings people together. In practice, you need your teammates to hold you accountable. Learning to depend on each other helps build bonds that can last decades. I have coached for 25 years, and some of those teams still keep in contact with me and each other.

7. Wrestling develops discipline and organization skills that will make you a better adult.

To be successful in wrestling, you must develop discipline. You can't skip practices or sit out and get better. Within 24 hours after your last activity, your body starts to lose what you were developing. You work so hard to get in shape to wrestle, taking time off just does not make

8. Wrestling teaches you how to focus and master something difficult.

There are a lot of techniques in wrestling, and some wrestlers try to master many techniques, but the best wrestlers usually have one or two moves that are unstoppable. It takes a lot of time and repetition to master a move.

9. Wrestling provides opportunities to further your education and advance your career.

Wrestling can provide opportunities for scholarships in college and even at some technical schools. The fastest growing sport in America right now is women's wrestling. There are wrestling programs at all levels of college from JUCO to Division 1. There are programs at Ivy League schools as well as military colleges. There are even club programs at colleges if you just want to wrestle two days a week and still compete. *Forbes* and *Fortune* magazines have

10. Wrestling is a lifelong activity that is fun.

Last but not least, wrestling is fun and can be done your whole life. There are tournaments and practices for people as young as four and as old as 80. I have

wrestlers that were deaf, blind, missing a leg and with other different abilities. Wrestling is passed down from father to son, mother to daughter or son. Many families will keep headgear and shoes to give to the next generation.

In Conclusion: Wrestling is an amazing sport that provides opportunities to learn things that will make you a better person and help you throughout your life. Wrestling is for everyone: Young and old, male and female, short or tall and all weights. It helps develop strong bodies and minds, teaches you about hard work and develops discipline, personal responsibility, mental toughness, focus, provides opportunities to establish healthy

eating habits and helps build lifelong friendships.

I feel blessed to still be involved with a sport that I love so much. If you don't have children that wrestle, I encourage you to give it a try and then keep encouraging them to stick with it. It is a hard sport, but can also be extremely fun.

Editors note: Almost a decade ago, Union County wrestling coach Michael Smith-Foot offered his first guest column, encouraging local youth to consider joining UCHS' brand new wrestling program.

Now, 10 years later, Union County has added a middle school, a youth and a women's team, and each one consistently places itself among the top squads in the region. In recent years, the UCHS men and women have collected a handful of State top-five finishes and it's only a matter of time before Union wrestling brings home its first State title.

With Union County wrestling entering its second decade, Coach Smith-Foot updated his 2012 column and we are proud to afford him this platform to describe the benefits, on and off the mat, that emanate from the world's oldest sport.

If you or someone you know is interested in wrestling, you may contact Coach Michael Smith-Foot at msmith-foot@ucschools.org. You may also contact coach Justin Byers: jbyers@ucschools.org or UCHS coach Richard Rivera: rrivera@ucschools.org.

One of the reasons I coach wrestling instead of other sports is because I hated standing on the side of a field blowing a whistle. Wrestling demands an active coach, one that can still demonstrate moves and wrestle with his or her team.

Blue Ridge Mountain Jeepers is an amazing sport that provides opportunities to learn things that will make you a better person and help you throughout your life. Wrestling is for everyone: Young and old, male and female, short or tall and all weights. It helps develop strong bodies and minds, teaches you about hard work and develops discipline, personal responsibility, mental toughness, focus, provides opportunities to establish healthy

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Join us at one of our meetings to find out what we're about. Meetings are the second Friday of each month at the Skillet Cafe. Lunch is at 11:30 a.m. and the meeting begins at 12:30 p.m.

For more information, please attend a meeting or contact us via our website, www.blueridgemountainjeepers.com. View our Calendar of Events and see photos of recent rides and activities. Also "like" us on Facebook.

Blue Ridge Mountain Jeepers

2023

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