

## High school wrestling grabbing foothold

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Imagine the curious looks when Dr. James Naismith put up two peach baskets on opposite ends of a building in 1891 and called it basketball.

I imagine it was similar to the scene last Tuesday when Fayetteville High School hosted the first wrestling meet in Northwest Arkansas. In a gymnasium where Ronnie Brewer once maneuvered with ease, a crowd watched as boys in tights clashed on a large mat in the middle of the floor. One side of the bleachers was full, including those not knowing exactly what they were witnessing.

“Woohoo, three points for Fayetteville,” a teenage girl stood and screamed.

“Three points for what ?” her friend asked.

“I’m not sure, but it’s three points.”

“Cool.”

Fayetteville won the triangular meet by defeating Gentry and Bentonville. Another meet is scheduled for Jan. 13 in Bentonville.

Sixteen schools in Arkansas are fielding wrestling teams this year, leaving Mississippi as the only state without high school wrestling. Some of the schools are in Northwest Arkansas, including Fayetteville, Bentonville, Springdale, Springdale Har-Ber and Gentry. Wrestling likely will become a sanctioned sport in Arkansas next season when more schools add teams.

“It’s coming. I don’t see any way to stop it,” Fayetteville Athletic Director Dick Johnson said while watching Tuesday’s meet. “It’s an exciting sport, it’s 1-on-1, and [a match ] can turn on a dime. You can have someone dominating the match and then, all of a sudden, the other guy wins.”

That’s exactly what happened during a heavyweight bout involving Fayetteville’s Anthony Ingram. A wrestler from Gentry had Ingram on his back before Ingram reversed positions and won on a pin.

Ingram leaped into the arms of cheering teammates after being declared the winner.

“This was my first match and I didn’t really know what to do,” said Ingram, a junior who plays nose guard for the Fayetteville football team. “I’m having fun, and I’ll learn more as I go. I plan on wrestling next year, too, after football.”

While wrestling long has been popular in the Midwest and Northeast, it’s a novice sport

that is taking its first baby steps in Arkansas. Future meets should include handouts to the crowd that explain the rules. Educated viewers will only enhance to the excitement of the sport.

But, hey, things take time to evolve. No one was doing a crossover dribble and dunking on Naismith's peach baskets in 1891. One of the most noticeable aspects of Tuesday's meet was the wide range in size of the athletes involved. There were 112-pound matches all the way up to the heavyweight division at 285 pounds. Young men who are not big enough to play football or basketball can compete against others their size in wrestling. Someday, on the same floor where Ronnie Brewer played, a top-notch wrestler will emerge from Fayetteville and move on to the college ranks. That opportunity has finally arrived. On Dec. 19, history was made when Fayetteville hosted the first high school wrestling meet in Northwest Arkansas. There will be many more meets to come.

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