



Arkansas needs 40 letters by Aug. 1

Roger Moore - NewsPress

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— The Arkansas Activities Association’s board of directors voted 13-4 on Wednesday to sanction wrestling as a high school sport.

According to Lance Taylor, executive director for the AAA, “If 40 superintendents show me a letter by August 1, that they are going to participate in wrestling this year, we don’t have to vote again.”

Although not solely responsible, Greg Hatcher has been the driving force behind getting the state of Arkansas a high school state championship in wrestling. Taylor has asked 40 athletic directors to submit letters — Hatcher says at least 45 schools are ready to participate.

The Arkansas Wrestling Foundation agreed to purchase a mat for the first 40 schools that started wrestling programs.

“It’s a great win for the kids in Arkansas,” Hatcher said. “All the little kids that we’re coaching out there in youth sports, they’re going to have an opportunity to wrestle for an official state championship.”

During the 2007-08 school year there were 14 tournaments held in the state, including a state tournament in March. Bentonville was the champion in the 16-team field.

Many of the young athletes wrestling in Arkansas have started to learn the basics from one of collegiate wrestling’s best, Pat Smith, a four-time NCAA champion for Oklahoma State.

Smith leads the Arkansas Wrestling Academy.

“Having someone with the knowledge in the sport like Pat has been a blessing,” said Hatcher. “The kids are certainly learning the right way at an early age.”

Also in attendance in Little Rock this week has been Oklahoma State coach John Smith for the 2008 Olympic Hopeful Training Camp. Jamill Kelly, a silver medalist at the 2004 Olympics, was part of the staff.

“This is a great day for the sport of wrestling, and for the state of Arkansas,” said John Smith after Wednesday’s vote by the AAA. “It’s pretty impressive to see how many participants are already competing without a sanctioned state championship.”

The National Wrestling Coaches Association honored Hatcher for his efforts last August by giving him the Dan Gable “America Needs Wrestling” Award.

“People like Greg Hatcher represent what this award means,” said NWCA Executive Mike Moyer last August. “He’s been spearheading coaching education, additional avenues for kids, positioning wrestling as a way to combat Arkansas’ childhood obesity problem and has been footing the bill for much of it.

“His altruistic approach to bringing wrestling into an area where it’s been lacking speaks volumes about his love of the sport and his willingness to give the kids in his state additional opportunities to compete.”

As of Aug. 1, Hatcher and Co. hope Mississippi is the only state that doesn’t offer wrestling as a high school sport beginning with the 2008-09 school year.

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