

Wrestling meets sanctioning requirement

BY NICK WALKER
ARKANSAS DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

Greg Hatcher is on the phone making a deal.

His left leg is bouncing up and down. One of his two cell phones is ringing while he's talking on the other, and his secretary is paging him on his office phone, but nothing is going to stop him from making this sale.

Hatcher is a successful insurance man with a downtown office near the state capitol, but it isn't a policy he's selling today. No, Hatcher is trying to persuade another school to join the 15 already committed to high school wrestling this fall.

"You can't say for sure that you'll sign up today?" Hatcher asks the athletic director on the other end of the phone. "Well, I tell you what, find out what you think your school board is going to say and then call me back. I'll give you my cell phone number. Call me anytime, 24-7. If you're up, I'm up."

While he didn't get that athletic director, who also was trying to get his team ready for a football game that night as the school's football coach, to commit, he did get his 16th school to sign up before Friday ended. Academic Plus Charter School in Maumelle became that school when it signed up Friday.

Having 16 schools, with Episcopal Collegiate joining in 2007 to become the 17th, under agreement was key for Hatcher and the Arkansas Wrestling Association. Sixteen is the magic number for any high school activity in Arkansas. In order for the Arkansas Activities Association — the governing body of high school activities — to vote to sanction a sport, it must have 16 members.

Hatcher is convinced that with the 16 schools he and the AWA have recruited, plus a few of the 23 more he has had discussions with, the AAA will vote to sanction wrestling next season. That would make Arkansas the 49th state to sanction high school wrestling, leaving only Mississippi without the sport.

Hatcher points to the fact that wrestling is the third-largest sport in the United States in terms of revenue and attendance.

HIGH SCHOOL WRESTLING

At an officiating clinic at his Mighty Bluebird facility in west Little Rock, Hatcher and the Arkansas Wrestling Association certified 27 officials Wednesday and hope to certify more Dec. 5. Leading the clinics is Jim Ramirez, who has officiated at 13 NCAA Division I tournaments.

On Sept. 27, the AWA announced eight initial schools — Arkansas School for the Blind, Fayetteville, Bentonville, Brinkley, Pulaski Academy, Central Arkansas Christian, Gentry and Little Rock Hall — that would begin wrestling in 2007. Since then, eight more schools — Bismarck, Little Rock Catholic, Little Rock Central, Mountain Home, Russell-

ville, Springdale, Springdale Harber and Academic Plus Charter — have joined.

Athletic directors and coaches from the participating schools have met in Little Rock and set a schedule that begins Dec. 16. There will be six tournaments at various sites around Arkansas in addition to dual meets, and a state tournament at Bentonville on March 17, 2007.

Fayetteville already can claim three medalists, as senior 171-pounder Albert Carizales took home third, junior Andre Knox took fourth in the 140-pound weight class and sophomore Ben Schafenberg took fourth in the 189-pound weight class at the Tulsa Union Takedown Classic in Tulsa this weekend.

All 16 of those schools have been given wrestling mats, something that Hatcher and the AWA pledged to provide. They pledge to get mats for the next four schools to begin wrestling in 2006-2007.

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