

OTHER SCHOOLS

Nixa building a winning tradition in girls' wrestling

The Eagles finished second in the state last year. They return plenty of talent from that squad, including state champ Cali Dupree



by Mary Ellen Chiles

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Nixa coach Dustin Martin uses spotlights and the football team's inflatable tunnel to fire up the crowd before home matches. (Photo by Dustin Martin)

Girls' wrestling has only been a high school sport in Missouri for six years, but Nixa is already establishing a dominant program.

The Eagles finished second at the state tournament earlier this year, just a half-point behind Francis Howell Central. Nixa's top athlete, Brenya Crahan, went undefeated as a senior and is now competing at Missouri Valley College, but the Eagles retained plenty of talent.

Coach Dustin Martin leads both of Nixa's successful boys and girls teams. As girls' wrestling has grown in popularity in Missouri, so has the Eagles' success.

Cali Dupree, senior, 155



Cali Dupree (left) helps a teammate after a practice match at Nixa High School. Dupree wears headgear to protect her ears — and about a half-dozen pairs of earrings. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

Senior Cali Dupree medaled in her first two years at state, then won the individual title for the 155-pound weight class last year. She also finished second as a freshman and third as a sophomore.

She's been wrestling since she was 6.

She was born in Branson, but she joined Nixa Youth Wrestling and got hooked. The organization is for boys and girls from 5-years-old to eighth grade and is affiliated with Nixa Public Schools.

Now, Dupree is on Team Missouri and competes around the country. She's a three-time All-American, meaning she's placed in the top eight at national competitions three times.

Dupree said she likes the self-reliance in the sport.

"I like how whenever you go out in the match, you're the only one that determines what happens," Dupree said. "You can't blame it on someone else. No, it's all on you."

Dupree is looking at colleges where she can study physical therapy and wrestle. Her grit has translated into her academics and now she makes nearly all A's.

"She's put a lot of effort into her grades," Martin said.

Addison Harkins, junior, 130



Addison Harkins (right) practices with a teammate at Nixa High School. The boys' and girls' teams, which are both coached by Dustin Martin, practice at the same time. (Photo by Mary Ellen Chiles)

Addison Harkins has been wrestling since she was in seventh grade and has competed at both 125 and 130. She placed second at state as a freshman and sophomore. Like Dupree, Harkins is also on Team Missouri.

Harkins is off to a strong start in her junior season — and she's already won 109 matches in high school.

She might end up breaking former teammate Crahan's record of 186-5.

"She's on track to probably be right in the contention with all-time winningest wrestlers," Martin said. "Addison is going to be very close."

Harkins got started when her mom saw a sign for Nixa Youth Wrestling and suggested it. She's competed ever since.

"I like that you always have to put the hard work in, and you see results," Harkins said. "In other things, it can feel more like luck, but (in wrestling) you make it happen. You can only rely on yourself."

She's considering wrestling in college if she can find a perfect fit for academics, though she hasn't picked a major yet.

"She's a very high-achieving student, probably one of the top students in our school," Martin said.

Harkins also uses her attention to detail to gain an edge in her sport.

"I visualize before the match and think about what I am going to do in hand fighting," Harkins said.

'It's a hard sport to get people into'

High school girls compete in folk-style wrestling, which emphasizes both wrestling on your feet and mat work. Martin said it takes time to learn the rules and it's difficult to learn because matches aren't televised.

"It's a hard sport to get people into because it's really complex," Martin said. "(In-person) is the only way to watch it."

Matches consist of three 2-minute rounds. In tournaments, athletes have at least 30 minutes between matches.

High school girls switch to freestyle — which involves mainly competing on your feet at a fast pace — for club and international competitions.

Martin likes to give the wrestling crowd a show, like having his athletes enter the gym under spotlights via the inflatable tunnel the football team uses at home games. He also reminds his wrestlers to embrace their power.

"You want to walk around before the match with confidence," Martin said. "You want to give the image that you are ready to go."



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