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OSAA approves adding state championship for high school girls wrestling

Bill Poehler, Statesman Journal

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WILSONVILLE — A year from now, hundreds of high school girls in Oregon will be competing for the first OSAA state girls wrestling championships.

The Oregon School Activities Association's Executive Board voted unanimously Monday morning to create a separate state championship division for girls starting in the 2018-19 school year. Oregon will become the seventh state to award state championships for girls wrestling.

"We're excited about making the change for next year with girls wrestling," OSAA Executive Director Peter Weber said. "We think it's an area that's continuing to grow."

Four years ago, there were about 100 girls competing in high school wrestling in Oregon; there are more than 400 girls competing this season.

When Washington started sanctioning girls high school wrestling in 2007, the state had fewer than 200 girls competing. As of 2017, there were more than 1,000.

Currently, girls in Oregon can compete against boys in district and OSAA state tournaments or they can compete against other girls in a separate exhibition state tournament.

Gervais freshman Alexys Zepeda (<http://www.statesmanjournal.com/story/sports/high-school/2018/01/16/alexys-zepeda-wrestling-gervais-contender-against-boys/1026524001/>), for example, is competing against boys in the OSAA Class 3A state wrestling tournament Friday and Saturday.

She won her weight classes at the 3A Special District 2 championship against boys and also won in the women's high school state qualifier.

Zepeda had to choose between competing in the girls' exhibition state tournament — which runs concurrently with the OSAA state tournament — or competing with the boys.

She chose to compete with the boys and is the No. 4 seed at 113 pounds.

In the championship model approved by the Executive Board, girls like Zepeda will be able to compete against girls for an official girls state championship or in the bracket against boys starting in the 2018-19 school year.

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As opposed to sanctioning girls wrestling as a separate activity in Oregon — as is the case with sports like tennis, basketball and soccer — girls will have their own division for state championship under the wrestling banner, much like how Class 6A is its own division for wrestling.

“Depending on the growth of girls wrestling and as they develop, you could see the OSAA Executive Board request to them to sanction girls wrestling,” said OSAA Assistant Executive Director Brad Garrett, who oversees wrestling.

“At this point, while they’re growing, they’re not there yet. There were a little over 400 certifications for girls this year. We have about 5,000 boys.”

Willamina has a traditionally strong wrestling problem for boys but — like most high schools — has experienced a decline in participation in recent years.

“We have some girls wrestling in our middle school,” said Willamina principal Tim France, who is on the Executive Board. “I’m hoping that yes, this will be an avenue that will hopefully increase participation.

“I think all we’re doing is expanding the possibilities for that gender of the sport to grow. Overall, I think it’s going to be a good move for the sport.”

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