



Wrestling Matters

November 20, 2007

Why NY Should Adopt State Regional Tournaments Part One

Despite Recent Improvements Concerns Regarding State Tournament Remain

NYSWCA Conducted National Survey Of State Wrestling Tournament Formats

Survey Results Point To Multiple-Entry State Regional Qualifying Tournaments As Best Solution

In the past four years, the New York State Wrestling Tournament has seen a lot of change - mostly for the better. Many more student-athletes now participate in the event and some genuine progress has been made in getting more deserving athletes into the tournament. At the same time however, concerns about the tournament and the qualifying process in particular continue to exist.

The major concern is that the qualifying process for the state tournament does not give every competitor at least a similar chance to qualify for the championship event. New York's sectional tournaments, used to determine who goes to the state tournament, send only one entry to the states from qualifying events that are as small as two schools and as large as fifty-two schools. And, as the recent addition of at-large entries to the state tournament showed, the single-entry per section format has likely kept many of the state's best wrestlers out of the tournament for decades.

This past summer, the NYSWCA with the help of W.I.N. Magazine's Rob Sherrill, conducted a state-by-state survey to see where the New York State Tournament stood in comparison to other states and to assess how other states conducted their state championship process. The findings were shared with the joint NYSPHSAA/NYSWCA working group reviewing the NYS Tournament format.

What We Found

The survey results showed that in every state – except New York – multiple wrestlers advance from the qualifying tournaments to the state tournament based on their placement in these qualifying events. The New York State Tournament is the only single-entry state tournament in the nation – advancing only one wrestler in each division from twelve very unequal sectional tournaments. Furthermore, it is the only state in the country where some wrestlers gain entry to the championship tournament without wrestling a single qualifying bout.

The standard practice for most states is to advance multiple wrestlers to the state tournament from numerically balanced qualifying tournaments – each tournament having roughly the same number of schools. In the larger states where preliminary qualifying tournaments are necessary, the same standard is applied - numerically balanced groupings with multiple wrestlers advancing from preliminary qualifiers to the final state qualifiers. Take for example Ohio with 529 schools, the top four

wrestlers from numerically balanced sectional tournaments advance to their district tournaments where the top four wrestlers advance to the states.

Other states advance multiple entries based proportionally on the number of schools in the qualifiers. In Pennsylvania with 497 schools for example, where district tournaments qualify wrestlers for the regional tournament, districts are allocated multiple-entries to the state regional tournament based proportionally on the number of schools in the district. Then, multiple wrestlers, as determined by the number of schools in the region, advance from the regional tournament to the states.

Whether it's numerically balanced or proportionally allocated qualifying tournaments, it is clear that both approaches, together with the concept of multiple-entries, are designed to achieve a sense of fundamental fairness in the state's championship event. The dominant organizational principle across the country starts and ends with giving each athlete at least a similar opportunity to reach the state tournament thru fair competition.

State Regional Tournaments For New York

The survey results also showed that state regional tournament systems, much like the highly successful Pennsylvania State Tournament system, offered the best working model to address concerns about New York's state tournament. Both New York and Pennsylvania are geographically large states with 500 or so wrestling schools split in two divisions. New York and Pennsylvania also share a similar organizational structure in that New York's sections much like Pennsylvania's districts are not changed to achieve more or less equal numbers of schools for championship competitions.

Accordingly, much like Pennsylvania, a New York State Regional Tournament system would establish state regional tournaments as part of the "play-off" format for the New York State Wrestling Championships. New York's sections, like PA's districts, would be allocated entries to the state regional tournament based proportionally on the number of schools in the section and region. Multiple wrestlers would advance from the sectionals to the regional qualifier where multiple wrestlers would then qualify for the state finals tournament based on their placement in the regionals.

Establishing state regional tournaments as part of New York Wrestling's "play-off system" would give every wrestler a similar opportunity to reach the state finals tournament. All the wrestlers in the state finals tournament would have wrestled their way into the tournament and the best wrestlers in the state would have a path to the state tournament regardless of geography.

"Each regional wrestling tournament should provide a proper culminating activity for the wrestling programs of our member schools. All should provide equitable opportunities for wrestlers to qualify for the final state tournament."

- Colorado High School Athletic Association Wrestling Playoff Bulletin, Philosophy p.17