

Officiating is helping Hernandez of Texas open more opportunities for women in wrestling

Note: Kim Hernandez of Converse, Texas, has been a wrestling official for the past six years and was named a Rookie Official of the Year by Rocky Mountain Nationals this past year. Hernandez spoke to Bill Barron about her experiences. This is an excerpt of the interview. Go to WIN-Magazine.com to read full Q&A.

Q: How and when did you decide to become an official? What is your view of an official's role and responsibility as it relates to your interaction with the athletes, coaches and spectators?

A: I decided to become an official in 2017. I wrestled in high school; since graduating in 2004, I had not stayed involved in the wrestling community. However, in 2017 I was recruited to officiate high school football. I enjoyed it and thought: "I never played football in high school and was able to officiate. I wrestled in high school, so I should give officiating wrestling a shot."

As an official, my role is to be pro-



(RMN Events photo)

Kim Hernandez, a former high school wrestler, became an official in 2017 and has worked many RMN events.

fessional on and off the mat. As a female

official, one of my goals to be a role model for the young ladies who are growing in the sport and let them know there are ways to stay involved in wrestling, whether it is participating, coaching or officiating. On the mat, my top priority is to ensure the safety of the wrestlers. Wrestling is one of the most physical sports for athletes, which is why prioritizing safety is imperative.

Q: What you have learned about yourself, the sport, and the athletes/coaches. Personalize this experience for your readers, so they can see it through your eyes.

A: Officiating has taught me to step outside of my comfort zone. I've officiated other sports before. In a "crew" environment, you have other officials to help back up a call. In folkstyle wrestling, you usually do not have this advantage. We use assistant officials, when possible, but most of the time, it's just one official.

It was very uncomfortable at first. It hasn't happened very often, but in the past comments were made alluding to "women should officiate women's matches only" or that I am "good for a female official." I don't want to be good "for a female;" I want to be a good official regardless of my gender. I don't want to call just girls, just boys, or just kids. I want to call all matches at all levels.

Q: Which aspects have made officiating as a female an advantage?

A: Being a female has given me an opportunity to promote women in wrestling and grow the sport. There are ways to stay involved in the sport that doesn't involve competing. Coaching is a wonderful way to stay involved, but it can also be time-consuming with year-long commitments that need to be made for a program to be successful. Officiating gives me the opportunity to be a role model and mentor for the current and next generation of officials, regardless of gender.

Q: What recommendations do you have for female officials on how to be successful and remain focused despite others who may be less supportive.

A: Find a mentor. There are many seasoned officials out there who are willing to share their wealth of knowledge. Ask questions and never stop learning. Take the negativity like a grain of salt. When negativity is experienced, one can slow from it or grow from it. Always choose the latter.

Be humble. While it is important to

be firm, it is just as important to be approachable. Do not expect preferential treatment. We are officials. Not female, not male. When asked to work, work hard, and leave no doubt in anyone's mind that you are qualified.

Know your limits. It's okay to feel the pressure of a hot match or high-level tournament. Taking a breather when you've reached a limit is respectable. It shows self-awareness and commitment to being the best official you can be.

Q: Why is it important for wrestling to have female representation at all levels of the sport?

A: Female representation is necessary at all levels to promote sports (of any kind) to the youth. Children emulate what they see. If they see female representation in all sports, it encourages them to participate in and, maybe down the road, explore the officiating route. In addition, it is important to have women in leadership roles within organizations. As president for my local Texas chapter of high school officials, we have increased our female official count by helping women empower each other.

Q: What is your background in the sport of wrestling? How does being an official augment and relate to your other experiences in the sport? What lessons did the sport teach you that you would like to impart to the athletes you now officiate?

A: In Texas high school competition as a sophomore, junior and senior, I qualified for state twice: runner-up my junior year and medically DQed my senior year to finish fourth.

As a prior wrestler, I can relate to some of the positions or moves that some wrestlers may execute and understand the potential for injury. This allows me to be proactive in identifying potentially-dangerous or illegal situations and address them immediately.

Wrestling has been foundational to my development into a Marine and working professional. The hours spent training, the joys of winning and the tears of losing played into the character development I now have that has carried me through demanding situations.

Wrestling is one of the few sports that is both individual and team. If you lose a match, you can't blame your teammates, but if you lose or don't pin a kid it could impact the team score in a dual/tournament. Wrestling is for everyone, regardless of gender, height, weight — there is a spot for you on the team. ■

Dan Gable

Motivational Speaker

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