



THE WOMEN'S WRESTLING PLAYBOOK

A definitive guide for athletes and parents to master the mat, prioritize long-term health, and navigate the complex landscape of college recruiting.



Navigating a Booming Sport

One of the **fastest-growing** high school and college sports.

115+

Collegiate Programs Nationwide



Health

Injury prevention and biological realities.



Environment

Gear, hygiene, and co-ed dynamics.



Mindset

Handling pressure and defining support roles.



Pathways

Decoding NCAA, NAIA, NJCAA, and NCWA options.

Two Lenses, One Shared Goal

The Parent Lens

Is she safe from concussions and joint injuries?



How do we handle the costs and travel?



What are the long-term impacts of weight cutting?



The Athlete Lens

How do I manage match-day nerves?



How do I balance training with school and friendships?



How do I prove myself in a male-dominated room?



Both require the exact same foundation: a structured, communicative environment that prioritizes development over extreme, short-term outcomes.

The Biological Reality of the Mat

The Female Athlete Triad



Extreme measures to "make weight" disrupt female hormones differently than male hormones. Break Break the cycle.

Injury & Safety Protocols

Prevention

- ☐ Proper falling techniques
- ☐ ACL & shoulder health
- ☐ Neck strengthening

Sanitation

- ☐ Strict hygiene policies
- ☐ Ringworm & skin infection prevention

Supervision

- ☐ Clear return-to-mat concussion protocols

The Weight Management Paradigm Shift

Old School Tradition



- Rapid dehydration & severe calorie restriction.



- Pressure to cut down to the lowest possible class.



- Leads to low energy availability and burnout.



New Science Reality



- Focuses on fueling, sustainable nutrition, and hydration.



- Higher minimum body fat thresholds established for girls (approx. 19% in high school rules).



- Promotes long-term athletic health and peak power output.



Bottom Line: Choose the weight class that allows for maximum training intensity, not the one that requires starving to survive.

The Logistics and Environment Checklist

Anatomy of a Healthy Club



Gear & Uniforms

- ▶ Girls-cut singlets required
- ▶ Appropriately supportive sports bras
- ▶ Designated practice attire for co-ed rooms.



Medical Readiness

- ▶ Med kits stocked with menstrual supplies
- ▶ Standard tape and ice readily available.



Culture & Boundaries

- ▶ Presence of female coaches or mentors
- ▶ Transparent parent communication
- ▶ Strict behavioral boundaries in co-ed environments.



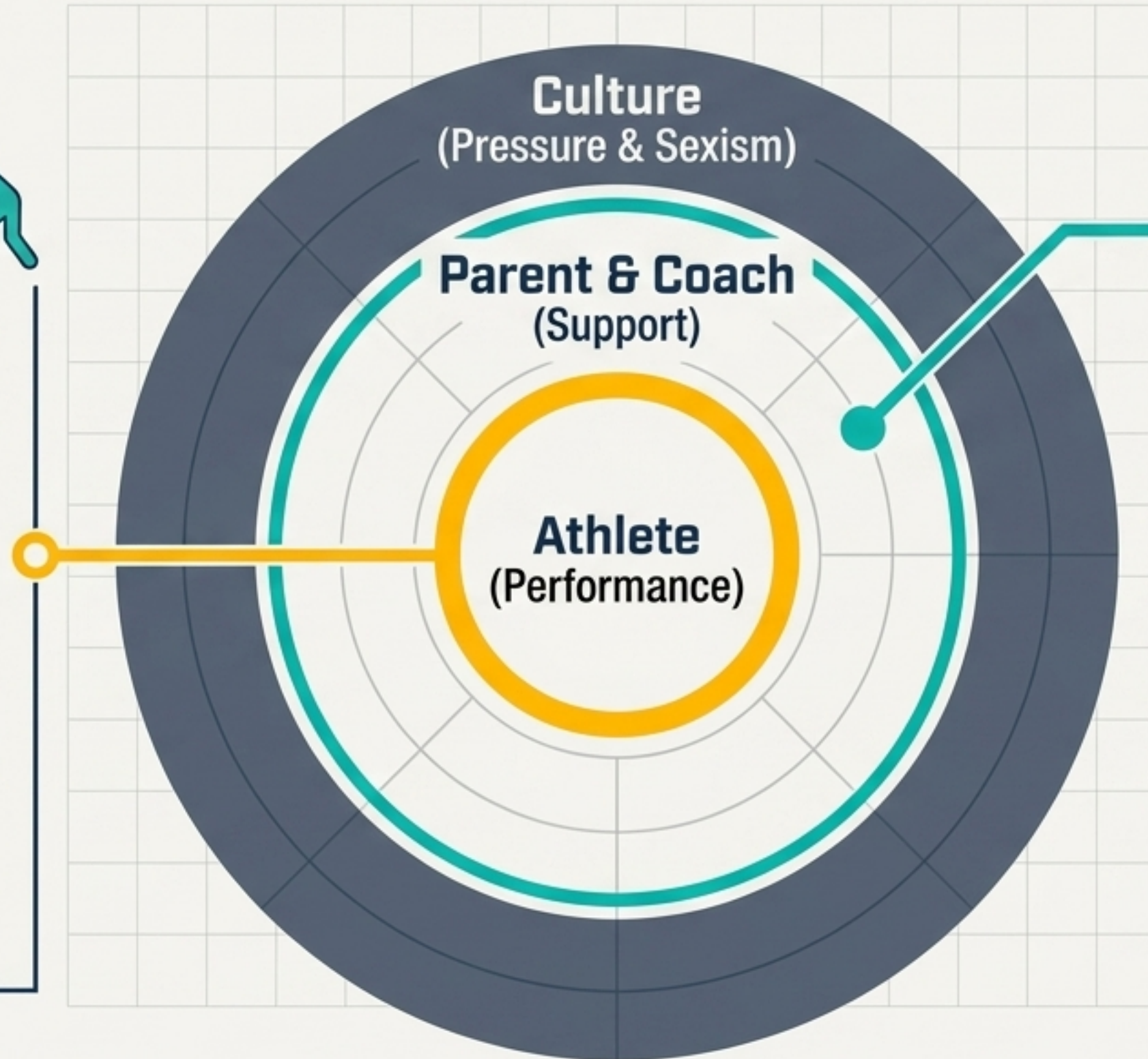
Cost Management

- ▶ Realistic budgeting for club fees
- ▶ Accounting for travel tournaments & camps
- ▶ Planning for specialized gear.

Mastering the Mental Mat

The Athlete's Challenge

- » Navigating sexism in a male-dominated sport.
- » Managing online image and public attention.
- » Keeping pre-match routines simple to combat nerves.



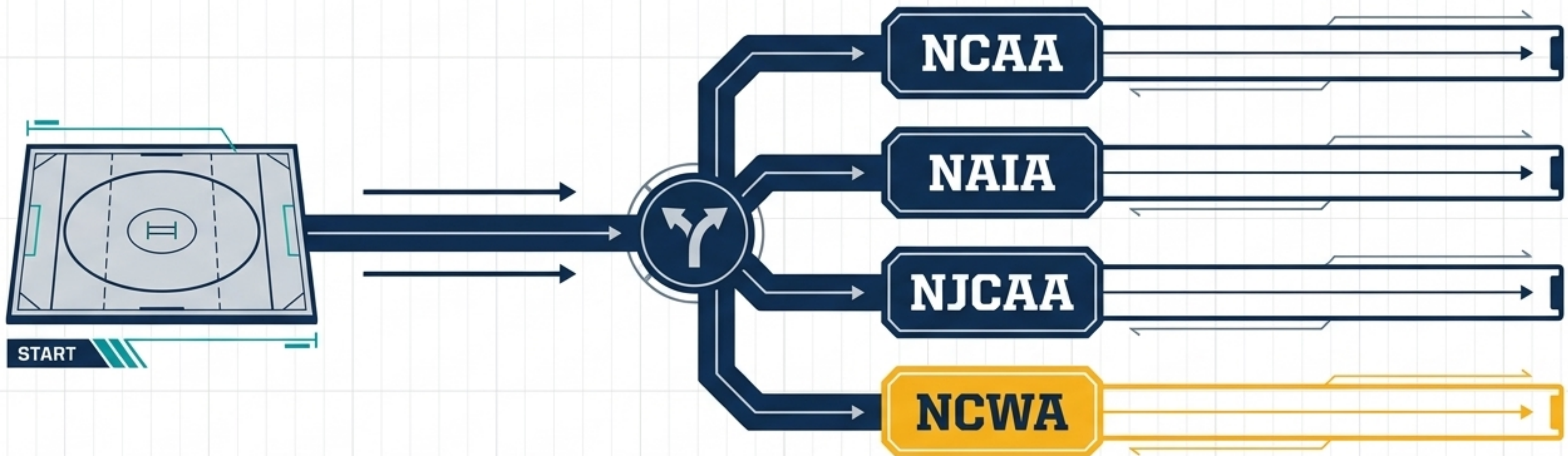
The Parent's Role: The 'Silent Teammate'

- » **Explicit Job:** Manage travel, nutrition, and logistics.
- » Provide **emotional support** focused on effort, not wins.
- » **Crucial:** Avoid sideline coaching or post-match critiques to preserve the coach-athlete relationship.



The Horizon Beyond High School

Collegiate women's wrestling is not a monolith. With the NCAA slated to make women's wrestling an official championship sport in 2025, and over 115 programs nationwide, families must understand that scholarships, rule sets, and academic requirements vary wildly depending on the path chosen.



Mapping the Four College Pathways

College Pathways

NCAA



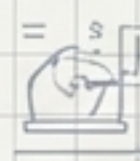
- » Highly structured environment.
- » Strict eligibility clocks.
- » Transitioning to official championship status.



NAIA



- » Scholarship-heavy model.
- » Established championship culture.



NJCAA



- » The 2-year stepping stone.
- » Focused on athletic development or academics.



NCWA



- » The critical fourth option.
- » Collegiate folkstyle, flexible eligibility.
- » Serves transitional programs and major universities alike.

Alternative Route

USA Wrestling Club Pathway: For athletes pursuing pure freestyle outside collegiate governing bodies.

Spotlight: The NCWA Advantage

Founded in 1997 by Jim Giunta, the NCWA is a nonprofit organizing collegiate folkstyle wrestling (not just 'club') for 162 institutions.

The Competitive Edge



- » Hosts the largest single recognized collegiate national championship.
- » 2025 women's division saw the closest 1-2-3 finish in NCWA history.



Explosive Growth

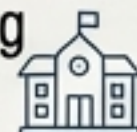
- » Exploded to 86 women's programs.
- » Added 27 new programs last season.
- » 51 teams feature ranked individuals.



Who is it for?



- » Ideal for athletes seeking collegiate competition without constraints of an NCAA/NAIA varsity commitment.
- » Perfect for athletes attending major universities building new programs.



The Pathway Comparison Matrix

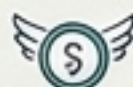
	NCAA	NAIA	NJCAA	NCWA
Eligibility	Strict 4-in-5 years rule.	Standard Varsity rules.	Standard Varsity rules.	Flexible 4 seasons anytime; min 6 credit hours (9 in Fall 2026), 2.0 GPA.
Funding	Varsity scholarships.	Varsity scholarships.	Standard Varsity rules	Athletic Department funded, scholarships advancing, or self-funded.
Wrestling Style	Freestyle dominance.	Freestyle dominance.	Standard Varsity rules	Collegiate Folkstyle focus.
Transferability	Athletes can compete in NCWA and still have eligibility left for NCAA/NAIA transfers (4 total years across all associations).			

Deciding Your Right Fit

What matters most to you?

IF

Maximizing athletic scholarship is the priority



Target

NAIA / NCAA

IF

Prioritizing a specific academic institution that lacks a varsity team



Target

NCWA

IF

Continuing to develop in Folkstyle rather than transitioning to Freestyle



Target

NCWA

IF

Having a non-traditional academic timeline or needing maximum flexibility



Target

NCWA / NJCAA

The Recruiting Playbook

Visibility & Exposure

Prioritize verified results at major events (Fargo, NCWA Nationals, regional opens) over local tournaments.



Senior

Junior

Sophomore

Roster vs. Lineup

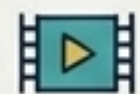
Understand the critical difference between being recruited to simply fill a roster spot versus being recruited to start in a weight class lineup.



VS.



Action Items



☒ Fulfill film review requirements.



☒ Maintain strong academic standards (GPA).



☒ Learn to self-advocate directly to college coaches, rather than relying solely on high school coaches.

The Holistic Navigator



The division you choose changes the environment, but it does not change the necessity of discipline. Managing weight weight safely, resisting extreme cuts, and maintaining emotional balance in high school are the exact mechanisms that prevent burnout and enable a full four-year collegiate career, regardless of whether you wrestle NCAA, NAIA, or NCWA.

THE NEXT STEP IS YOURS

Core Takeaway: The onus of discipline and self-advocacy falls on the athlete, but navigating the journey is a team effort.



Resource Hub



Foundations & Freestyle

USA Wrestling & Wrestle Like A Girl
(Foundational guides and freestyle pathways).



High School Advocacy

SanctionPA & State Organizations
(Pushing for high school sanctioning).



Collegiate Folkstyle

NCWA.net & rules.ncwa.net
(Exploring folkstyle collegiate programs and eligibility specifics).

