

HISTORY OF WRESTLING IN ALASKA

Wrestling in Alaska had its beginning in 1961. In those days, East High and West High were double shifting but no formal wrestling programs were in existence until Wally Smith agreed to coach an East team if Keith Johnson would coach a West team. Smith and Johnson introduced their teams during a halftime performance at a basketball game. The Eagles and Thunderbirds, clad in dyed longjohn underwear, wrestled Alaska's first dual meet with each school winning two matches.

Anchorage's first tournament was in 1962-63 and consisted of five teams---East, West, Palmer, Kenai, and Kodiak. Gary Bernardson replaced Wally Smith at East and coached for two years until Ron Lavalley took over. In 1967, Jerry Palmer assumed the Thunderbird helm. About this same time, Kent Hansen at Mt. Edgecumbe introduced wrestling to Southeast Alaska. Another program was also started at Seward.

Southcentral teams competed in the Western Alaska High School Association Tournament from 1962 until 1972. West Anchorage was a dominant team until 1969 when East Anchorage won three consecutive titles. During those years, larger schools were classified as AA and smaller schools as A. Homer was the Division A winner in 1969, giving up the crown to Chugiak for 1970 and 1971.

Chugiak first began competing in wrestling in 1967 under the tutelage of Dick Kerbow and didn't waste any time becoming recognized as a top grappling school statewide.

The first Alaska State High School Wrestling Tournament was held at Service High School in 1972 with the first and second place regional winners in each weight competing from the two geographic regions of Alaska---Southeast and Southcentral. Fifteen schools from throughout Alaska were represented but no scores were kept, but it was noted that the Southcentral schools had eight champs to only four for the Southeast schools. The 1973 State Championship was held in Juneau, but again no team scores were kept.

In 1979, the state championships were divisionalized into small schools (Division I) and large schools (Division II). Then in 1985, the divisions were revised into classifications based on enrollments. At that point, any school under 400 students would wrestle for the 1A-2A-3A State Championships, while schools over 400 were 4A.

DIVISIONAL CLASSIFICATION

Beginning in 1979, both large and small schools participated in one state tournament, although the schools were divided into Division 1 (small schools) and Division II (large schools) for scoring purposes. This continued through the 1984-85 season. Beginning in 1985-86, schools were classified into 4A (large) and 1A-2A-3A (small) schools as is still the case at present.

SEASONAL CLASSIFICATIONS

For two years, wrestling was split into two separate seasons. Schools were allowed to choose the season in which they wished to wrestle irregardless of enrollment size. As a result, Region 5, the Kenai Peninsula, some smaller Region 3 schools and the Interior schools chose the fall season, while Regions 4, 6, and the Mat-Su Valley and Kodiak chose the spring season.