

JAMIE GERMANO staff photographer

A challenge Eastridge High's Rachel Prince, practicing against Shane Metcalfe, says wrestling lets you work with your muscles and your mind.

Wrestling for acceptance

Participation increases for girls, but so do critics who complain they don't belong

BY STAFF WRITER
JAMES JOHNSON

Female championships

What New York State Female Folkstyle Wrestling Championships.

When 11 a.m., today, Weigh-ins, 7:30-9 a.m.

Where Geneva High School

Divisions There are three divisions for wrestlers: Kindergarten-5th grade; 6th-8th grade and 9th-12th grade.

For wrestlers \$10 pre-registration, \$15 day of event; All participants must purchase \$20 USA Wrestling Card.

To register Call (315) 789-0645.

For spectators Admission is \$2 per person or \$5 for a family of three or more.

Andrea Molino, who wrestled for two seasons on her school's JV team. "But there's not much I can do about it."

The argument that comes up the most when it comes to boys wrestling girls is that the boys are in a no-win situation.

You "only" beat a girl if you win. And if you lose?

"If you get beat by a girl you'll get a lot of ribbing from your teammates," says Peter



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Frustrating Eastridge High wrestlers Amber La Forme and Rachel Prince often have matches canceled because boys don't want to wrestle against girls.

Clarq, a 189-pounder at Eastridge.

Spencerport senior Shawn Hibbs, a state champion last season, other wrestlers and coaches all seem to have stories about boys who quit or nearly did so after losing matches to girls.

"They ask themselves 'Should I wrestle? What's wrong with me?'" says Hibbs. "I don't think you should get like that."

Hibbs says he was uncomfortable during his only match against a girl, even though he was leading 14-0 before pinning her.

"I wasn't ready for it," says Hibbs. "Certain moves I thought 'I shouldn't do that.'"

"I don't know too many guys who are comfortable with it. Some may feel they can be more physical with guys."

Neither Section V nor the

New York State Public High School Athletic Association track the number of girls wrestling. The National Federation of State High School Association says 2,361 girls in the country wrestled on boys modified, freshman, junior varsity and varsity teams during the 1998-99 school year.

The number was 1,907 in 1997-98. There are at least 11

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Wrestlers

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girls wrestling at some level in Section V.

"The trend has been consistently going up (over the last 8-10 years)," says NFSHSA assistant director Jerry Diehl. "It's not a high incline, but it's going up."

It remains to be seen whether interest will ever be high enough for girls to have wrestling leagues of their own.

Lloyd Mott, assistant director of the New York State Public High School Athletic Association, says there has been more of a push in the last two years from parents and female and male wrestlers to separate the sexes.

"That would be a great thing," says Spencerport coach Bill Jacoutot. "It's no different than in judo. I think you start causing problems when you start mixing the sexes."

"It's going to possibly generate a bad taste in everyone's mouth. If they start their own programs, it could be like (the rise of) women's hockey."

In their blood

La Forme, Rachel Prince, her teammate at Eastridge, and Molino all come from wrestling families. Brothers. Cousins. Uncles. They all wrestled while La Forme, Prince and Molino watched, at first.

"I always used to go to my brother (Jeremie's) practices (at Greece Athena)," says La Forme. "He would come home and say 'I still need to practice,' then he would practice on me."

Prince has two brothers and both are on the Eastridge varsity.

"My father would always talk about (wrestling) with my older brother Aaron and my younger brother Kyle," Prince says. "Then, all my uncles were into it."

"That's why I had to do it. It's fun, and I think it's the best sport. You work with your muscles and your mind."

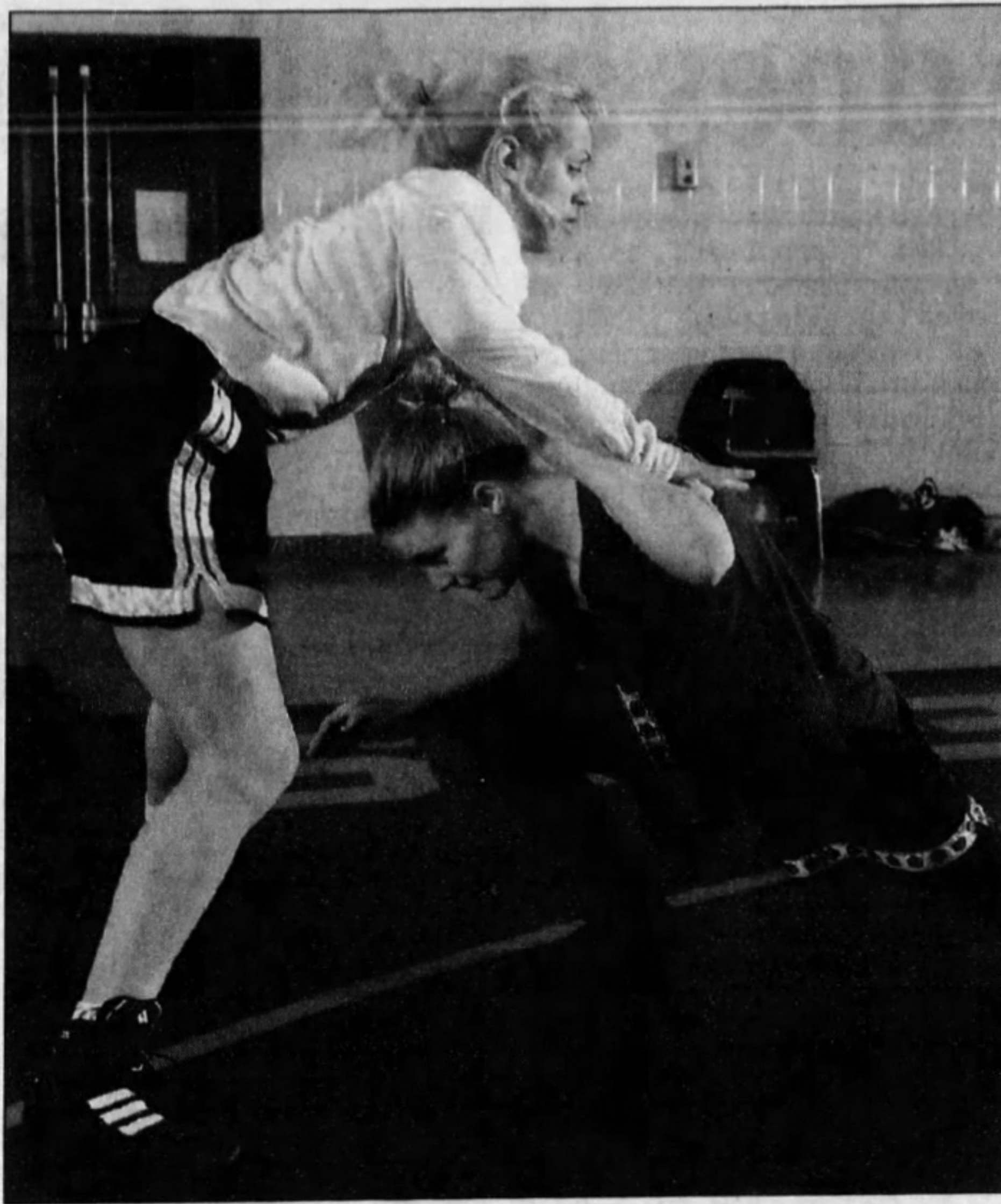
Molino remembers going to matches with her father, Dan, who wrestled when he was in high school.

"It's always been my favorite sport," she says.

Andrea's interest in wrestling picked up even more as a freshman after watching former Attica standout Emme Conway, a Section V Tournament runner-up in 1996.

"I told her no because I didn't see too many (girls) out there," says Dan Molino, whose daughter joined the Wayne program as a freshman. "I started to put some things together and I thought, 'if you want to wrestle, I'll let you try it.'"

"I told her right from the begin-



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Strong armed Eastridge's Rachel Prince, right, and Wayne's Andrea Molino work on takedowns during at practice.

ning what to expect. (People) are going to resent you, it's going to be an uphill climb."

Dan Molino says that a couple of people have said "they don't think it's right" that his daughter wrestles boys, but for the most part people don't say anything about it.

"But I know that there were kids who hated it," says Dan Molino. "Sometimes you get shunned out. The coach has to set the tone."

Total mismatch?

Every girl who wants to join her school's wrestling team must undergo a physical fitness test. La Forme's included included sprints, agility drills, a one-mile run and prolonged chin-ups known as arm hangs to test her strength.

If they pass the tests, they and their parents must sign injury waiver forms.

The girls then contend with the first few awkward days with male teammates that might or might not accept them.

"In one instance, (girls) came to make the team and then they sat there and did nothing," says Clarcq.

"(Prince and La Forme) come and work hard. We do a lot of things that will test you mentally and physically."

"We don't give them any

breaks."

Girls in the seventh and eighth grades, wrestling in the lightweight divisions up to 119 pounds, can hold their own against male opponents.

That begins to change as male wrestlers mature physically, enabling them to muscle their way to wins over girls.

Some male wrestlers refuse to square off against a female opponent under any circumstances at dual meets.

Eastridge varsity coach John Vandemark says that in 10 dual meets where a boy is matched up against a girl, the match won't take place in six of those instances.

"(Teams) say, 'We don't have anyone at that weight or we're going to bump a guy up,'" says Vandemark. "It's always done to make it look like that wasn't the reason, but it was."

"At tournaments, you can't avoid (those matchups). At a dual meet, (the match) doesn't happen."

Andrea Molino says that some of her male opponents underestimate her skill level, strength and toughness. One for instance, stopped in the middle of a match to see if Molino was OK after accidentally knocking the wind out of her during a takedown attempt.

"There are some who are into it, doing all of their moves," says Molino. "Some try to take it easy

Girls in the spotlight

The following wrestlers are among the group of girls who are on either their school's varsity, junior varsity or modified teams:

Shea Coleman (Honeoye Falls-Lima); **Krystal DiSanto** (Brighton); **Rebecca Hensel** (Penfield); **Becky Huether** (Geneva); **Rebecca Krebs** (Penfield); **Amber La Forme** (Eastridge); **Charity McCray** (Wayland-Cohocton); **Andrea Molino** (Wayne); **Rachel Prince** (Eastridge); **Tabitha Stauffer** (Wayland-Cohocton); **Jonquil Waterstraw** (Greece Athena).

on me because I am a girl. I can tell by the way they react after the match (too).

"One kid that beat me, felt really bad. Another one called me a nasty name after I beat him."

What's next?

How long will it be before there are all-girls teams in Section V?

Estimates range from five years to never.

"To win that battle, you have to start at the sectional-level," says Holley coach John Grillo. "That could be done next year."

Grillo, who opposes girls wrestling boys, recommends that each of the state's sections field a team.

Wrestlers would train with the boys teams at their schools during the week and then travel with their sectional teammates to meets and tournaments on weekends.

If enough participation interest is there, Grillo says, perhaps countywide teams could be formed.

"Every section in New York should have one team of girls with a girl or two in each weight class," Grillo says.

Jacoutot says that schools could choose to field an all-girls team with fewer weight classes.

"Start small, get bigger," says Jacoutot. "There's nothing wrong with that. Publicize it. Start pee-wee and junior-high programs."

"The girls have to sell it to a school, and the school has to find competition."

Organizers of the New York State Female Folkstyle Wrestling Championships today in Geneva hope their event will start to drum up interest in wrestling among girls.

A similar event in Ohio recently attracted 50 participants.

"If we can do that well in our first year we think we will have had made an impact," says Jeff Huether, the New York tournament's coordinator and whose daughter Becky wrestles at Geneva.

"We have to start somewhere." □