



Wrestling: *Australian Wrestling Union*

'Virtually every society around the globe sports a long tradition of some form of wrestling'.¹

When you talk of wrestling many Australians think about the professional Wrestlemania or World Wrestling Entertainment, with all its theatrics and hype. However, the true sport of wrestling is rooted in antiquity and is quite different to the made-for-television version.

Archaeological finds depict wrestling in Egypt and Mesopotamia more than 5,000 years ago. Documentary evidence puts the sport in India and China well before the Christian era. Wrestling also figures prominently in classical Greek legend, myth, and epic. In fact, virtually every society around the globe sports a long tradition of some form of wrestling.²

Australian Wrestling Union Inc.

The Australian Wrestling Union (AWU) is the peak body for the sport of wrestling in Australia. This includes freestyle wrestling for men and women, as well as Greco-Roman and beach wrestling styles. The AWU is recognised by the Australian Sports Commission (ASC), the Australian Olympic Committee (AOC) and the International Wrestling Federation (FILA).

The aims of the organisation are:

- to develop the sport of wrestling,
- promote recognition of wrestling as a competitive sport,
- integrate and foster participation of both sexes at all levels of wrestling in Australia, and
- to maintain neutrality and not admit any form of discrimination.

The organisation's strategic plan *'Towards 2010 – An Overview'* outlines a vision 'to excel by providing the pathways to excellence for our members, by being committed to high standards for the conduct and development of wrestling'.³

Cultural diversity within wrestling

As a sport, wrestling has a huge following in Europe, the Middle East and the Americas. A large number of AWU's older wrestlers are first generation immigrants, while the younger wrestlers are often their children.

The AWU has no official data on participation from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) and Indigenous people in wrestling, however from observation it estimates approximately 85–90 per cent of its members are of a CALD background.⁴

One shining example is Ali Abdo, who represented Australia in wrestling at the Athens Summer Olympics in 2004 and was awarded the winner of the 2003 Young Achievers Award by The Australian Arabic Council in 2003.

The potential to get ugly

The AWU states that racism is not tolerated in the sport of wrestling. The majority of Australia's wrestlers come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds, and in a combat sport, this could have potentially disastrous effects. There have been a few incidents over the last few years that had the potential to get ugly; as a result the AWU developed the Grapplers Youth Sport program to educate athletes, coaches and officials to develop a more inclusive culture within the sport.

Grapplers Youth Sport program

In 2005, DIMA provided the AWU with a \$50,000 Harmony Day grant for the Grapplers Youth Sport program in response to incidents during competitions, where accusations of racial discrimination had been made.

The national project aims to eradicate discrimination and racial bias in wrestling through education and training of young wrestlers, their parents, coaches and officials.

It provides messages of tolerance and 'fair play' incorporated into wrestling handbooks.

The handbooks use photos of young athletes from a wide range of cultural backgrounds to emphasise the global nature of the sport. These booklets are also read by parents and friends of the wrestlers, which helps spread this message to the broader wrestling community.

The training of coaches and referees in anti-discrimination matters was trialled initially and then implemented nationally. All coaches using the 'Grapplers' program are provided with additional training and support material to increase their awareness of the importance of inclusive behaviour. Referees are also provided with additional training in conflict management and inclusive behaviour as part of their training.

How does the program work?

Clubs register with the AWU to take part in 'Grapplers' Program. They then receive basic information on the program and assistance to meet eligibility requirements (this includes: being an AWU endorsed club; have a National Coaching Accreditation Scheme (NCAS) accredited coach, be able to meet all legal duty of care requirements, and; have implemented the AWU Safer Clubs program).

Once clubs have met these requirements, they will be accredited to run the 'Grapplers' program and will receive:

- A 'Grapplers' Kit - containing a wall poster of the National Youth Framework , 'Grapplers' progress chart, resource material for the 'Grapplers' program, a set of 'Grapplers' wrestler logbooks;
- Promotion on AWU website as an accredited club;
- Certificate of accreditation; and
- Access to the Wrestler of the Month award scheme.

The club then issues the 'Grapplers' wrestling logbook to young wrestlers and the coach delivers the program (it is adaptable enough to fit in with most wrestling training schedules). As the wrestler achieves the skills listed in the program they are assessed by the coach and it is signed off in the wrestlers' logbook.

On completion, the logbooks are returned to AWU, who then issues the wrestler a certificate of achievement, a recognition award and the new log book for the next stage of program.

Policy on ethical behaviour

The AWU has an inclusive sports policy which is backed up by a comprehensive policy on ethical behaviour (which is specified in the AWU constitution) and codes of behaviour (from Australian Sports Commission's *Active Australia* guidelines) for players, parents, teachers, coaches, administrators, officials and spectators.

Each of these codes reinforces the importance to 'respect the rights, dignity and worth of all participants regardless of their gender, ability, cultural background or religion'.⁵

In addition, the AWU Coaches Code of Ethics (see also Australian Sports Commission's National Coaching Accreditation Scheme) states that coaches should: 'respect the rights, dignity and worth of every human being - treat everyone equally regardless of sex, disability, ethnic origin or religion' and 'refrain from any form of harassment toward your athletes - this includes sexual and racial harassment, racial vilification and harassment on the grounds of disability'.⁶

The AWU's Code of Ethics also covers athletes when competing at major international events and states that all AWU Wrestlers shall: 'treat opponents with respect' and 'recognisDisseminating information

An ARL Development initiative, Club Admin Centre, is an online site designed as a 'one-stop shop' for club administrators around Australia. It contains contact and links information and a download section containing a range of ARL policies and rules.e and applaud honesty and wholeheartedly the efforts of team-mates or opponents regardless of gender, ability, cultural background, or religion'.⁷

These policies are disseminated to clubs and promoted on the AWU website. The ethics agreements also refer to the ASC's Harassment-free Sport Guidelines if more information on harassment issues is required.

Endnotes

¹ *'The History of Wrestling'* on the AWU website at www.australianwrestlingunion.org.au.

² Ibid.

³ AWU strategic plan *'Towards 2010 – An Overview'* on the AWU website at www.australianwrestlingunion.org.au.

⁴ Email from AWU National Operations Manager Cheryl Bollard (12 June 2006).

⁵ Policy on codes of behaviour in AWU's Risk Management Policies – June 2003. P16.

⁶ AWU Coaches Code of Ethics on the AWU website at www.australianwrestlingunion.org.au.

⁷ *AWU's Athletes Code of Ethics* when competing at major international events on the AWU website at www.australianwrestlingunion.org.au.