

Beyond the Mat: Describing the Journeys of Female Professional Wrestlers in Jilin Province

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ABSTRACT

This study explores training and competition experiences of female professional wrestlers in Jilin Province, aiming to understand their career journeys, challenges, and developmental needs in traditional Chinese wrestling. Adopting a qualitative approach, it involves semi-structured interviews with seven female athletes and coaches and performance observations. Findings identify their physical, technical, and psychological demands (injury, weight control, competition stress). It proposes tailored training programs with periodization, mental training, and tech tools, emphasizing coaching support and gender equity. This research contributes to building a supportive ecosystem for female wrestlers, enriching coaching practices, and revitalizing traditional Chinese wrestling.

INTRODUCTION

Chinese wrestling is one of the most ancient traditional sports in China, with a history dating back more than 2,000 years. Evolving from a form of military training, it has developed into a cultural activity that embodies courage, discipline, and collective identity. Over centuries, it has been not only a sporting event but also a social symbol, reflecting such values as strength, resilience, and national spirit. However, the establishment of the modern competitive sports system has gradually marginalized traditional wrestling. The removal of Chinese wrestling from the 7th National Games marked a crucial turning point, after which institutional support, public attention, and participation in this sport declined sharply. Consequently, many athletes switched to international wrestling and judo, leading to fewer Chinese wrestling competitions, diminished social influence, and an uncertain future.

This downward trend is particularly pronounced in Jilin Province, a historically significant region for Chinese wrestling in China. Despite its profound cultural heritage and long-standing training traditions, Jilin now faces challenges including the shrinking of competition platforms, limited talent development channels, and low public participation. These structural problems not only threaten the sustainable development of the sport but also imperil the cultural heritage embodied in it. From a phenomenological perspective, the personal experiences of athletes—especially female athletes—reveal how these systemic changes exert impacts at individual, professional, and cultural levels. The uncertainty surrounding their training conditions, competition opportunities, and career paths mirrors the broader social and organizational challenges confronting wrestling.

Research on Chinese wrestling has primarily examined its historical evolution, structural challenges, and strategies for modernization, emphasizing institutional reform, cultural preservation, and diversified promotion models (Zhu et al., 2018; Zhu, 2017; Meng, 2021). Cultural scholars frame the sport as a carrier of national heritage and traditional values (Liu, 2019; Zeng, 2020), while athlete-focused studies concentrate on physical fitness structures, technical-tactical analysis, and performance optimization, particularly among male wrestlers (Wang, 2017; Zhang, 2021). Training effectiveness and conditioning methods, including high-intensity interval training and functional training, are well documented (Vasconcelos et al., 2020; Tai & Tai, 2021), alongside research on weight management and physiological responses to competition (Huang, 2024; Guo, 2024). Psychological studies further highlight the role of stress regulation, coping strategies, and emotional control in athletic performance (Huang & Zhong, 2021; Zhao et al., 2021). However, these works remain largely quantitative, male-centered, and fragmented across physical, technical, and psychological dimensions.

Although scholarship acknowledges the growing participation of women in wrestling, research specifically addressing female wrestlers' lived experiences remains limited, often focusing broadly on gender issues in sport rather than on the integrated realities of training, competition, injury management, and identity formation (Magapu, 2022; Rivera Robles, 2019). There is insufficient qualitative,

region-specific investigation—particularly within Jilin Province—into how female wrestlers navigate sociocultural expectations and high-performance demands. Drawing on Athlete Development Theory, Psychological Resilience Theory, and Gender and Empowerment perspectives, this study synthesizes prior research to develop an integrated framework that connects structured training systems, mental resilience, and gender-responsive support mechanisms. By positioning female wrestlers' experiences at the center, the study advances a holistic, evidence-informed model tailored to their developmental and contextual needs.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Gender Equality Theory in Sports

Gender equality theory, rooted in feminist and human rights frameworks (Magapu, 2022; Rivera Robles, 2019), centers on eliminating gender-based discrimination, bias, and structural barriers that limit women's access, participation, and advancement in social spheres—including sports. The theory emphasizes that women athletes should enjoy equal opportunities in training resources, competition platforms, recognition, and support systems, free from stereotypes that frame combat sports as "male-dominated." Core tenets include challenging gendered norms about physicality, addressing systemic inequities (e.g., underfunding of women's sports programs), and valuing women's athletic experiences as distinct yet equally valid to men's. In the context of this study, gender equality theory provides a lens to examine how female Chinese wrestlers navigate gender-specific challenges—such as limited training partners, societal perceptions of women in combat sports, and overlooked developmental needs—and how targeted interventions (e.g., gender-responsive training programs, inclusive policies) can foster equity. This theory aligns with the study's focus on empowering female wrestlers and promoting their full participation in a traditionally marginalized sport.

Sports Socialization Theory

Sports socialization theory (Harris et al., 2019; Melnyk et al., 2024) explains how participation in sports shapes individual identity, values, and social behavior, while also being influenced by social structures (e.g., family, coaches, communities). The theory posits that sports serve as a critical agent of socialization, fostering qualities such as resilience, discipline, teamwork, and self-efficacy, and constructing athletes' sense of self in relation to their sport and broader society. For athletes, the socialization process includes internalizing the norms and expectations of their sport, forming relationships with coaches and teammates, and negotiating personal and professional identities through training and competition. This theory is foundational to the study's exploration of female wrestlers' journeys: their motivations for entering the sport (e.g., family influence, personal interest), the role of support systems (coaches, teammates) in their development, and how wrestling shapes their confidence, resilience, and life skills. By applying sports socialization theory, the study contextualizes individual experiences within larger social dynamics, highlighting how external

factors (e.g., training environment, community attitudes) interact with personal agency to shape athletes' careers.

Cultural Capital Theory

Cultural capital theory, proposed by Pierre Bourdieu, conceptualizes cultural capital as a form of resources—including knowledge, skills, traditions, and social networks—that individuals and groups possess and can mobilize to gain social status and opportunities (Zeng, 2020; Zhao & Li, 2019). For traditional sports like Chinese wrestling, cultural capital manifests in its historical heritage, technical traditions, and symbolic value as a marker of national and regional identity. The theory emphasizes that the preservation and transmission of cultural capital rely on active participation and institutional support; when such support declines (e.g., reduced competitions, marginalization in modern sports systems), cultural capital erodes. In this study, cultural capital theory illuminates the dual role of Chinese wrestling: as a cultural heritage that female wrestlers inherit and reproduce through their training and competition, and as a resource that can enhance the sport's social visibility and legitimacy. The theory supports the study's focus on revitalizing Chinese wrestling—by strengthening its cultural capital through youth promotion, folk competitions, and international exchange—while recognizing female wrestlers as key agents in sustaining this cultural legacy. This framework also helps explain how the sport's declining institutional support has diminished its cultural capital, creating barriers for female athletes' development.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

A qualitative research design was adopted, as it is well-suited to exploring complex, subjective experiences of female wrestlers that are difficult to quantify (Creswell, 2014). The study integrated two core data collection methods: semi-structured interviews (the primary method) and non-intrusive performance observations. This mixed qualitative approach allowed for in-depth exploration of participants' training and competition journeys, while triangulating data to enhance validity.

Population and Sample

The study included female athletes who were actively engaged in Chinese-style wrestling in Jilin Province. To qualify for participation, the athletes had to be at least 18 years old, have a minimum of one year of continuous training and competitive experience, and be currently affiliated with a recognized wrestling team, club, or training center in the province. They also needed to be actively training and competing at the time of data collection and willing to provide informed consent. In addition, selected coaches were required to have at least 10 to 15 years of coaching experience in Chinese-style wrestling, direct experience coaching female wrestlers, and current affiliation with a recognized wrestling institution in Jilin Province. Excluded from the study were male wrestlers, athletes from other combat sports, female wrestlers below 18 years old, individuals with less than one year of experience, retired athletes who were no

longer actively competing, coaches without experience working with female wrestlers, and any individuals unwilling or unable to provide informed consent.

Data Collection

Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews conducted individually with seven female wrestlers and four experienced coaches in Jilin Province. Prior to the interviews, participants were informed about the purpose of the study, ethical considerations, and their rights as participants, and written informed consent was obtained. Each interview followed a validated interview guide covering background information, training experiences, competition experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and future aspirations, while allowing flexibility for probing and clarification to obtain richer insights. Interviews were audio-recorded with permission and later transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Throughout the process, the researcher maintained confidentiality and created a supportive environment to encourage honest and reflective responses. The collected data were then prepared for thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns, themes, and meaningful insights related to the experiences of female wrestlers.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative data, following a systematic six-step process. After transcribing the audio recordings verbatim, the researcher conducted repeated readings of the transcripts to achieve data familiarization. Initial codes were then generated by identifying significant statements and recurring ideas related to training experiences, competition challenges, psychological coping strategies, and support systems. These codes were grouped into broader categories based on conceptual similarities, and emerging themes were developed to reflect the shared experiences of the participants. The themes were continuously reviewed and refined to ensure internal consistency and alignment with the research objectives and theoretical framework. To enhance credibility and trustworthiness, the researcher maintained an audit trail of coding decisions and ensured that interpretations were grounded in participants' actual statements. The final themes formed the basis for synthesizing findings and developing the proposed female-centered training framework.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study generate important theoretical implications by extending and refining existing perspectives in Athlete Development Theory, Psychological Resilience Theory, and Gender and Empowerment Theory. First, while Athlete Development Theory emphasizes structured periodization, long-term training progression, and performance optimization, the findings suggest that female wrestlers' development is not solely determined by physical training variables. Instead, performance trajectories are shaped by the dynamic interaction of physiological demands, psychological coping mechanisms, institutional support, and sociocultural expectations. This extends the theory by

highlighting the need for gender-responsive adaptations within athlete development models, particularly in combat sports traditionally structured around male performance norms.

Second, the findings contribute to Psychological Resilience Theory by demonstrating that resilience among female wrestlers is not only an individual trait but also a socially mediated process. While existing theory often conceptualizes resilience as personal coping capacity, the results show that coaching style, peer relationships, family support, and organizational climate significantly influence athletes’ emotional regulation and competitive confidence. This broadens the theory from an intrapersonal focus to a more ecological perspective, suggesting that resilience in high-performance sport emerges through interaction between the athlete and her environment.

Finally, the study advances Gender and Empowerment Theory by illustrating how female wrestlers actively negotiate identity within a male-dominated sporting culture. Rather than positioning women merely as marginalized participants, the findings reveal their agency in redefining strength, professionalism, and athletic legitimacy. At the same time, persistent structural constraints—such as limited recognition, resource disparities, and cultural stereotypes—demonstrate that empowerment is uneven and context-dependent. In this way, the study both supports and critiques existing gender frameworks: it affirms the relevance of empowerment discourse while emphasizing the need for sport-specific, culturally grounded applications.

More specifically, the findings for the two objectives are presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3.

Objective 1: To Describe Female Wrestlers’ Experiences in Trainings and Competitions

Table 1. Summary of Findings on Female Wrestlers’ Training Experiences

Theme	Frequency	Key Findings
Background, Motivation, and Personal Growth	7	“Many female wrestlers start their journey due to family influence, school programs, or personal interest. Wrestling has played a crucial role in shaping their self-confidence, discipline, and resilience. Over time, the sport becomes an integral part of their identity, providing not just physical strength but also mental endurance.”
Training Philosophy, Regimen, and Strategies	7	“A standard training regimen consists of three daily sessions, each lasting around 150 minutes. These sessions are typically divided into 40% technique work, 30% strength training, and 30% conditioning. The most effective methods include explosive drills, high-intensity interval training, and technique refinement exercises. Wrestlers

Athlete Development and Overcoming Challenges	7	also incorporate flexibility and injury prevention routines to sustain peak performance.” “Athletes must constantly adapt to new challenges, both physical and psychological. Common injuries include knee, shoulder, and lower back strains. Psychological challenges involve self-doubt, maintaining motivation, and handling competition pressure. Coping mechanisms include mindfulness, structured recovery plans, and strong mentorship from coaches and senior athletes.”
Competition Preparation and Experience		“Pre-competition preparation includes weight management strategies, targeted technique refinement, and mental conditioning exercises like visualization. Wrestlers often experience nervousness before matches, but strong mental preparation helps them stay focused and perform optimally. Competing in national and international tournaments fosters a competitive mindset and builds resilience.”
Team Support, Reflection, and Future Aspirations	7	“Support from coaches and teammates plays a crucial role in an athlete’s career. The wrestling community fosters a strong sense of camaraderie, where feedback and encouragement help athletes refine their techniques and build confidence. Many wrestlers aspire to compete internationally, win major titles, and contribute to the growth of women’s wrestling.”

Discussion:

In the study of Wang (2025), adolescence is considered the golden stage for cultivating freestyle wrestlers, where scientific selection and evaluation are crucial for athlete development. Studies suggest that the selection of young wrestlers should consider body type, physiological functions, motor coordination, and psychological qualities, using quantitative, qualitative, and comprehensive evaluation methods. Many female wrestlers begin their careers due to family influence, school programs, or personal interest, and the sport significantly shapes their self-confidence, discipline, and resilience. Over time, wrestling becomes an integral part of their identity, fostering not only physical strength but also mental endurance.

The findings indicate that female wrestlers follow a rigorous training program with a balanced focus on technical skills, strength, and endurance. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) and short-frequency explosive drills have been highlighted as particularly effective in improving performance, aligning with Vasconelos et al. (2020). The structured training programs allow athletes to

develop both physical conditioning and technical refinement, ensuring optimal performance during competitions.

According to Huang, Z. et al. (2021), psychological challenges remain a key aspect of an athlete's journey. Many wrestlers struggle with self-doubt, motivation maintenance, and competition-related anxiety. These findings suggest that mental resilience training should be incorporated alongside physical preparation to create a well-rounded athlete. Techniques such as visualization, self-affirmation, and guided meditation have shown promising results in improving focus and confidence.

In addition, Huang (2024) writes that pre-competition weight reduction in female freestyle wrestlers significantly affects body composition, biochemical markers, and maximal strength. A study on eight athletes from the Shaanxi women's wrestling team before the 2023 National Wrestling Championships found that a 17-day weight reduction led to notable decreases in body weight, fat mass, hemoglobin, testosterone, and maximal strength, alongside increases in urea nitrogen, reflecting physiological stress and potential fatigue. These changes highlight the importance of balancing weight control with training intensity and nutritional intake to preserve performance capacity. Pre-competition preparation also involves technical refinement and mental conditioning, including visualization exercises, which help athletes manage nervousness, maintain focus, and enhance resilience in high-level competitions.

For Song et al. (2023), support from coaches and teammates emerges as a crucial factor in athlete development. Encouragement, tactical feedback, and structured mentorship contribute to both skill enhancement and emotional well-being. A supportive environment helps wrestlers overcome performance slumps, recover from injuries, and maintain a positive outlook despite the demanding nature of the sport. The strong sense of camaraderie within the wrestling community fosters long-term commitment and passion for the sport.

Another significant finding is the role of structured competition preparation. Wrestlers follow a detailed regimen that includes weight management, skill refinement, and strategic planning before each match. This highlights the need for personalized training plans that cater to each athlete's unique strengths and weaknesses, ensuring optimal competitive outcomes.

Overall, these findings suggest that a holistic approach—integrating technical training, psychological resilience-building, and strong support networks—is essential for the sustained success of female wrestlers. Future research should explore additional methods to enhance psychological training, optimize training periodization, and improve injury prevention strategies for female athletes in combat sports.

Table 2. Summary of Findings on Female Wrestlers' Competition Experiences

Theme	Frequency	Key Findings
Pre-Competition Emotions	7	Wrestlers commonly experience a mix of nervousness, excitement, and anxiety before stepping onto the mat. Managing pre-match jitters is a crucial aspect of their mental preparation. Some wrestlers embrace this nervousness as part of their competitive drive, while others use structured relaxation techniques to remain calm.
Coping Strategies	7	To handle pre-competition stress, wrestlers employ various psychological techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, and self-affirmation. Many wrestlers develop personalized routines that help them transition into a competitive mindset, reinforcing their confidence and focus.
Weight Management	7	Wrestlers rigorously follow strict diet plans, hydration control, and adjusted training loads to ensure they meet weight-class requirements. Some athletes find weight management challenging, while others see it as a necessary aspect of the sport. Proper education on nutrition and safe weight-cutting practices remains vital.
Post-Competition Reflection	7	After a match, wrestlers engage in self-reflection, often using video analysis to evaluate their performances. They focus on identifying technical strengths and weaknesses, adjusting their strategies accordingly. This reflective process aids in continuous improvement and long-term skill development.

Discussion:

The findings indicate that female wrestlers' competition experiences are characterized by a blend of emotional, physical, and strategic elements. Pre-competition anxiety is common, yet athletes develop individualized coping strategies to manage their stress levels. Psychological resilience plays a key role in successful performance, reinforcing the need for targeted mental conditioning as part of training programs. These findings align with Cuncic, A. (2023), who highlighted the importance of handling performance anxiety in athletes through

structured techniques such as cognitive-behavioral training and mindfulness exercises.

According to Zhao, S. et al. (2021), questionnaire surveys and psychological experiments reveal that elite female wrestlers exhibit significantly lower failure anxiety and social expectation anxiety compared to lower-level athletes, and demonstrate superior stress-coping strategies and self-regulation abilities. To manage pre-competition stress, they often adopt psychological techniques such as deep breathing, visualization, and self-affirmation, along with personalized routines that facilitate the transition into a competitive mindset, enhancing confidence, focus, and overall performance.

In addition, Guo (2024) concluded that weight management emerges as another critical component of competition preparation. While necessary, it poses challenges for many wrestlers, particularly regarding maintaining energy levels and avoiding excessive stress on the body. Proper education on nutrition, hydration, and safe weight-cutting methods can help mitigate potential health risks and enhance performance sustainability. (Qiao coach) Post-competition reflections are integral to an athlete’s growth, enabling wrestlers to identify areas for improvement. Reviewing match footage and analyzing technical execution allow them to refine their strategies, leading to better results in future competitions. The structured approach of learning from both successes and setbacks fosters a culture of continuous development within the sport.

Overall, these findings suggest that integrating mental training, structured weight management, and reflective practices can significantly enhance female wrestlers’ competitive experiences. Future research should explore additional psychological strategies, nutrition optimization, and advanced performance analysis methods to further support female athletes in combat sports.

Objective 2: To Design an Enhanced Training Program for Female Professional Wrestlers

Table 3. Components of the Enhanced Training Program

Component	Description	Source
Periodization Model	Training is divided into base, specialized, and competition phases to optimize athlete performance and injury prevention.	Coaches' interviews
Customized Development Plans	Individualized training plans focus on technical strengths, conditioning needs, and tactical improvements based on video analysis and performance assessments.	Performance tests
Psychological Resilience	Mental toughness programs incorporate mindfulness, stress management, and confidence-building exercises to enhance focus and composure under pressure.	Psychological counseling

Support Ecosystem	A holistic support network involving nutritionists, sports psychologists, physiotherapists, and recovery specialists ensures comprehensive athlete well-being.	Expert recommendations
Technology Integration	Advanced tools like wearable fitness trackers, AI-driven motion analysis, and virtual reality (VR) simulations enhance training efficiency and injury prevention.	Sports science research

Discussion:

Periodization Model

The periodization model serves as the structural foundation of the training program, dividing the annual cycle into base, specialized, and competition phases. The base phase emphasizes general physical preparation, focusing on aerobic conditioning, foundational strength development, and the gradual introduction of technical drills. The specialized phase shifts the emphasis toward sport-specific conditioning, refining “signature” techniques, and integrating tactical scenarios reflective of competitive demands. The competition phase prioritizes peak performance through high-intensity but lower-volume sessions, ensuring athletes are physically fresh and psychologically ready for matches. This phased approach not only enhances physiological adaptation but also minimizes overtraining and injury risks, aligning with the cyclical training principles described by Fanatic Wrestling (n.d.).

Customized Development Plans

Individualized training plans are tailored to each athlete’s unique strengths, weaknesses, and competitive goals. These plans are informed by performance assessments, such as timed drills, strength benchmarks, and flexibility tests, alongside video analysis to identify biomechanical inefficiencies or tactical gaps. Athletes with explosive speed may be assigned programs that integrate plyometric training with rapid-execution drills, whereas those with superior endurance may focus on sustained tactical pressure during matches. As Melnyk, O., Cherkasova, A., Khimenes, K., & Moroz, T. (2024) notes, such personalized programming maximizes performance outcomes by aligning training stimuli with individual physiological and psychological profiles, thereby accelerating progress while maintaining balance in skill and conditioning.

Psychological Resilience

In high-stakes wrestling competition, psychological resilience is as vital as physical capability. Mental conditioning modules are embedded throughout the training calendar, incorporating mindfulness practices to improve focus, stress management exercises to maintain composure under pressure, and cognitive restructuring techniques to foster a growth-oriented mindset. Simulated match environments, complete with crowd noise and time constraints, are used to desensitize athletes to competitive stressors. (Liu Cong coach) emphasizes that for female wrestlers in particular, emotional regulation and confidence-building are crucial for sustaining performance consistency across tournaments. These

strategies enable athletes to recover rapidly from setbacks, adapt to unexpected situations, and make decisive tactical choices during matches.

Support Ecosystem

A high-performance environment extends beyond the wrestling mat. The program integrates a multidisciplinary support system that includes nutritionists for individualized dietary planning, physiotherapists for injury prevention and rehabilitation, sports psychologists for mental well-being, and recovery specialists for managing fatigue. Zeng et al. (2024) highlight that a tailored nutrition plan not only supports optimal weight management and muscle recovery but also ensures sustained energy levels throughout intensive training and competition periods. Regular interdisciplinary meetings among support staff and coaches ensure that athlete needs are addressed promptly, creating a coordinated and athlete-centered care model that reinforces both physical health and psychological stability.

Technology Integration

The application of sports science innovations plays a crucial role in enhancing athlete preparation. Wearable fitness trackers can continuously monitor heart rate, training load, and recovery indicators, thereby enabling data-driven training adjustments. AI-driven motion analysis captures real-time biomechanical data, providing precise feedback on technical execution and identifying risks before potential injuries occur. Virtual reality (VR) simulations can reproduce competitive scenarios, allowing athletes to practice tactical responses without physical strain. As Luo (2024) points out, these technologies not only accelerate the process of technical mastery but also reduce the likelihood of overuse injuries, thereby ensuring that training loads are optimally managed to maintain athletes' sustained peak performance.

The integration of a structured periodization model, individualized development plans, psychological resilience training, a comprehensive support ecosystem, and advanced technology creates a holistic framework for athlete preparation in Chinese-style wrestling. This multi-faceted approach aligns with existing research emphasizing the interplay between technical refinement, physical conditioning, mental toughness, and scientific innovation. By embedding these components within the training process, athletes are equipped to develop and optimize their "signature" techniques while maintaining peak physical condition and mental composure. The program's emphasis on personalization, interdisciplinary collaboration, and data-driven decision-making ensures that training remains adaptable to the evolving demands of high-level competition. Ultimately, such a systematic and well-supported training environment not only enhances current performance but also contributes to the long-term sustainability and progression of female wrestling on both national and international stages.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study highlights the multifaceted experiences of female wrestlers, emphasizing the need for holistic training programs that address physical, technical, and psychological aspects. Female wrestlers face unique challenges in their training and competitive journeys, including injury prevention, weight management, and psychological stress. Therefore, integrating comprehensive

training methodologies tailored to their specific needs is crucial for their long-term success and well-being. A well-structured training program should balance skill development, strength and conditioning, injury prevention, and psychological resilience.

Additionally, strong coaching and support systems are fundamental to an athlete's growth and performance. Coaches, teammates, sports psychologists, and nutritionists play an essential role in guiding female wrestlers through their training journey, offering technical guidance, emotional support, and tailored nutrition strategies. The presence of a robust support ecosystem fosters motivation, resilience, and confidence, enabling athletes to reach their highest potential. Ensuring that female wrestlers have access to high-quality mentorship programs can further enhance their professional development, helping them navigate the physical and mental challenges associated with competitive wrestling.

The importance of promoting gender equity in wrestling should also be emphasized. While female participation in combat sports has increased over the years, more efforts are needed to break down cultural and institutional barriers that may hinder women from pursuing long-term careers in wrestling. Strengthening community engagement, promoting media representation of female wrestlers, and ensuring equal access to training resources will further support the growth and visibility of women's wrestling at both amateur and professional levels.

Recommendations

Integrated Athlete Development

To ensure sustainable success, it is essential to implement periodized training plans and personalized development programs that cater to each athlete's unique strengths and weaknesses. Periodized training allows athletes to progressively enhance their skills, preventing overtraining and injury while optimizing peak performance at the right times. As suggested by Fanatic Wrestling (n.d.), cyclical training benefits wrestlers by strategically structuring training intensity and recovery phases to maximize long-term performance. Additionally, utilizing data-driven approaches such as video analysis, performance metrics, and competitive environment simulations enhances both physical and mental readiness.

Comprehensive Support Systems

A holistic support system is crucial for fostering high-performance female wrestlers. Establishing comprehensive athlete support networks that integrate psychological counseling, resilience training, and stress management is essential. Liu Cong emphasizes the importance of mental toughness in female athletes, highlighting that psychological resilience directly impacts performance and longevity in the sport. Implementing structured mental training programs, including mindfulness exercises, guided visualization, and cognitive behavioral techniques, will help athletes manage stress and maintain focus during competitions. Furthermore, collaborating with nutritionists, physiotherapists, and

sports psychologists ensures that athletes receive well-rounded support for their physical health, recovery, and mental well-being. Proper nutrition guidance enhances endurance, strength, and injury prevention, while physiotherapy-based recovery programs aid in long-term injury management.

Advancement of Coaching and Female Participation

Encouraging and expanding female participation in wrestling requires a dedicated effort to create an inclusive and supportive environment. Promoting female participation through dedicated events, grassroots development programs, and outreach initiatives strengthens the talent pipeline by attracting young female athletes to the sport. Organizing mentorship programs where experienced female wrestlers guide and inspire newcomers can significantly boost retention rates and motivation. In addition, it is vital to ensure continuous coach education, focusing on modern sports science, innovative coaching techniques, and the specific physiological and psychological needs of female athletes.

Feedback-Driven Progress and Research

Continuous progress in female wrestling can be achieved through structured feedback mechanisms and ongoing research. Implementing structured feedback loops allows athletes to share their perspectives on training effectiveness, helping coaches refine methodologies and address individual needs. Regular assessments, including athlete self-evaluations, coach evaluations, and performance analytics, contribute to a more dynamic and adaptive training program. Encouraging athletes to actively participate in the training design process fosters a sense of ownership, increasing motivation and commitment.

Additionally, supporting future research in female wrestling is essential for long-term growth and innovation. Conducting longitudinal studies across different regions provides valuable insights into the experiences, challenges, and developmental patterns of female wrestlers.

FURTHER STUDY

This research, while providing in-depth insights into the experiences and training needs of female professional wrestlers in Jilin Province, is subject to several limitations that warrant attention. First, the sample size is relatively small (7 athletes and 4 coaches) and geographically concentrated in Jilin Province, which may limit the generalizability of findings to female wrestlers in other regions of China with different cultural, economic, and sports development contexts. Second, the study adopts a qualitative research design centered on semi-structured interviews and observations, lacking quantitative data (e.g., statistical analysis of training effectiveness, large-scale surveys of psychological resilience) to complement and verify qualitative insights. Third, the research focuses primarily on active professional athletes, neglecting the perspectives of two critical groups: adolescent female wrestlers (who represent the sport's future talent pipeline) and retired female wrestlers (whose post-career transition experiences can inform career planning support). Fourth, the exploration of external influencing factors remains superficial, with limited discussion of how social-cultural norms (e.g., gender stereotypes about combat sports), media

representation, and policy support (e.g., government funding, school sports programs) shape female wrestlers' development. Finally, the study's focus on training programs and experiences does not delve into the biomechanical nuances of wrestling techniques for female athletes or the long-term physiological impacts of intensive training and weight management.

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