

In February 2006, contact was made with Mr. Rich Hollingsworth of the Ruth Mott Foundation. Mr. Hollingsworth had grown up in Indiana, as a wrestler, and pursued coaching a couple of different college teams in his career. Prior to his coming to Flint he worked at the Center of Disease Control in Atlanta, with emphasis on children and youth. With his background, it is understandable that Mr. Hollingsworth would want to help a local collegiate program and youth at the same time. After we met a couple of times it was suggested that I write a grant proposal to mentor middle school students, involve them in wrestling, and submit it to the RM Foundation.

In June a grant proposal for \$25,000 was officially submitted and subsequently approved in early September, to be implemented this fall. The grant involves going into the 4 middle schools of the Flint Community Schools and work 3 hours per week with a minimum of 25 students from each school. The duration of this pilot program is 12 weeks. During this period of time “Mott Bear” wrestlers will actively work with their “cubs” in four ways. These include: academic tutoring, performing community service, teaching principles of nutrition and (of course) coach them in wrestling.

Historically, Flint wrestling has produced some strong and excellent wrestlers since its incipient programs of the 1950’s. For over two decades the strongest voice for Flint wrestling was Michigan Hall of Fame Coach, Frances Bentley, who had many wrestlers go on to compete in DI programs, including the University of Michigan’s John Fisher, Will Waters, and Amos Goodlow. These men were Big Ten champions. Other Flint wrestlers competed at Michigan State, Central Michigan University, Grand Valley State University, and Morgan State University, to name a few. On the international level, John Matthews of Flint Central HS, won a Pan Am Gold and was a member of the 1984 US Olympic team the year of the boycott. Several Flint wrestlers have competed in the US Olympic trials, including John Fisher, freestyle.

For the past decade the city of Flint has been in a major economic decline, with the educational system taking the brunt of a declining enrollment, resulting in many budget cuts. Wrestling has been hit exceptionally hard as the middle school programs were dropped, as well as the summer Olympian programs (which reached k-adults). It is hoped that this program, which we are calling “Flint Youth Wrestling”, will go a long way in using the sport of wrestling to help young men get their eye on a higher prize, by turning it away from the despair of economic woes. Local high school coaches are looking forward to assisting in this endeavor. Mott Community College wrestlers are looking forward to mentoring and coaching these aspiring young athletes.

At the end of this pilot program, it is hoped that the program can be expanded to a year around endeavor. If “Flint Youth Wrestling” expands to a year around program it’ll include a middle school competitive season, a summer program for all ages and a formalization with Michigan USA wrestling, which will again help Flint wrestlers think on the state, national and international levels.