



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The thirteenth annual Brute Nationals Wrestling Tournament is now one for the books and has made for quite the feature. Whether you like to keep up with your favorite sport and are following along after the fact, you had a front row seat to the action in Independence, MO, or you tuned into the live stream on Flo Wrestling, here is an addendum to what took place just a couple of short weeks ago. The story is founded on the 1,400 plus student athletes who worked hard, sweat, bled, and fought their way through the two-day 2016 national event toward the spot at the top of the podium.

Wrestlers, coaches, clinicians, families, and fans from all over the country came together at the familiar Silverstein Eye Centers Arena on Friday, April 8 and Saturday, April 9, along with the dedicated officials and event staff to put on a competition like no other. Its success was no coincidence, though, as preparation for this full-scale tournament began the day following last year's record-breaking event. The end result was put on full display across 14 mats and 15 tournaments, as boys and girls, grades one through twelve, grappled for the elite title of national champion. From the 37 pound weight class to the 288 pound weight class, the contenders came in varying shapes and sizes, but they all shared one thing, and that was the desire to put their technique, skill, self-discipline, and determination to the test one match at a time.

Many, if not all, of these young wrestlers barely had time to let their singlets dry out, as Brute Nationals (BN) falls on the heels of the regular school wrestling season. Such is the life of a wrestler, though, as training and competition can easily span the entire year. This is merely one illustration of wrestling in a league of its own. Whether it's pre-season, post-season, off-season, or any season in between, a wrestler is a wrestler, and these are the athletes who make this event come to life year after year.

While wrestling "ranks first among all men's NCAA sports in 1st generation student-athletes," according to the National Wrestling Coaches Association, it's also an at-risk sport at the collegiate level, as more and more men's programs continue to be dropped. R.E.A.C.H.E.S. (Rewarding Educational Athletic Choices Helping Each Sport) is an organization that proactively works in opposition of this threat, at the elementary and high school levels. Likewise, it sponsors Brute Nationals in an effort to not only provide an exciting weekend of tough wrestling but also to bring it full circle through the use of its proceeds by giving back to the sport on these scholastic levels. The funds go right back to the local wrestling programs so that they can foster the student athletes of tomorrow.

Mary Mallis, Director of Marketing for Brute Nationals, elaborates on what the proceeds afford; "R.E.A.C.H.E.S. is an outstanding organization that gives so much back to the great sport of wrestling. I've been working at the Brute Nationals for nine years now because I know R.E.A.C.H.E.S. is making a difference in the lives of young wrestlers. It's amazing to think that they have raised over \$350,000 through this event to help struggling wrestling programs, startup programs, and individuals in competing to their fullest potential." Mallis sees it, coaches see it, the student athletes see it, and you can bet the effects don't end there. From having the money to clothe an entire team in uniform warm-ups to having the means to welcome and support a beginner on a young team, the opportunities are endless and the charity knows no bounds.

Director of Events, Jeff Bowyer, says, "It's gratifying to see the hard work, dedication, and passion of so many volunteers who have generously and sacrificially contributed over the years to assist wrestlers of all ages and abilities. R.E.A.C.H.E.S., through the Brute Nationals event, has supported one of the largest tournaments nationwide to contribute back to the wrestling community unselfishly to promote our great sport and see it thrive for generations to come!" The proof is in the wrestling rooms across the country, and if the results of past grants and donations from the R.E.A.C.H.E.S. fund are any indications, this wrestling community that Bowyer refers to has much to look forward to.

Ironic as it may be, given wrestling is an individual sport, it expands beyond the athlete and the coach, to encompass the family, fans, and friends. The wrestling world is oftentimes referred to as a family from within, in fact, and for this very reason, Brute Nationals was and always will be about the people off the mats, too. Especially with the newer venue and setup, it's a spectator-friendly event. Walt Fisk, Executive Director of R.E.A.C.H.E.S. and someone who has spent an incalculable amount of time both on and alongside the mat, is just as mindful of those who take part in the matches squirming in their seats. He headed the efforts to "provide a positive and memorable experience for everyone in attendance." As a fan, that's part of the attraction – you don't have to step onto the mat and grab an ankle band in order to be an insider. If you've received a hug wrapped in sweat, cheered for two or yelled at the clock, thanked an official, gone without eating for the sake of someone who had to make weight, sat in a less-than-luxurious seat for more than two hours, bounced off said seat in a futile attempt to help your wrestler, or studied brackets and scouted the opponents, you're a part of this wrestling family.

You are why wrestling is a sport worth supporting. It's something bigger than the wrestler, better than the records, and more valuable than the time invested. Supporting wrestling is about nurturing relationships and changing lives, and in ways that carry on beyond any one person's scope.

Similarly, competing in wrestling is about so much more than winning, and this is just one of the irreplaceable truths that wrestlers learn at Brute Nationals, between the matches and the clinics. Wrestling dad, Brian Silfies, of 1st-grade wrestler Jack, who traveled from New Hampshire to compete at 46 lbs., shared their first experience at BN:

My son Jack and I had an amazing time at Brute Nationals in Missouri. We were excited to go and the expectations were far exceeded --the setup, the fact that the brackets were up early in the morning and easy to find and follow, along with every other detail was just perfect. Jack made new friends from around the country and had a great time. Even though he had only six matches and hoped for more, thankfully, the tournament featured challenge mats, which is brilliant. You can get as many matches as you want. We are already excited to come back next

year! He really loved the experience in the parade of All-Americans and the overall respect with which he was treated as an athlete. Thank you!

These sentiments aren't rare in wrestling parents or young wrestlers, and are the motivation that fuels continuing such events like BN. Congratulations to all Brute Nationals wrestlers, place winners, national champions, and winners of the outstanding wrestler awards. Congratulations to the countless volunteers and contributors for pouring yourselves into such a commendable event. To see specifics about these student-athletes' performances, you can check out brutenationals.com. To learn more about R.E.A.C.H.E.S., browse the website and see the latest news and announcements.

Henry David Thoreau once said, "Not only must we be good, but we must also be good for something." Even the winningest wrestler recognizes that his/her career isn't self-serving. It starts on the mat, and it's only just the beginning.

Looking forward to 2017's Brute Nationals; until then, may you relish your place in the wrestling world.

-Tonette Fisk for R.E.A.C.H.E.S.