

## Update from Samantha Shepherd



So this week has been a huge opportunity flying out to Vegas for my second visit to the 2023 U.S. Open Championship for the Senior Women's Freestyle division class.

Out of all the competitors, and feeling like I am going in as a Chihuahua in a big dog fight, I am still pleased with the results... I went 2-2 overall for my stats. Not my best by far, but I wrestled hard, putting my body and mind to the mental and physical structures to hit the different techniques. Unfortunately/fortunately, I earned the hard draw of my first bout with the #1 seed, and again with premiere athletes to follow, I made it through the two rounds of 16, but I got my second loss in the second round of 8 of 32...a bit of a disappointment, but most importantly, I got to compete, to learn, to have fun, and enjoy the honor of being on the mats with these Olympians and all time ranked women. I may have "lost" by not making the top eight in placings, but I have gained so much more, and bring back these little learned skills to my arsenal.

To me it's not about the ranking and the competition per se, it's about where I started, and where I have come in my own wrestling journey. MY Wrestling career still isn't over and I will definitely keep growing. This was one of many more I can't wait for in my future: as an experience to take in and make the best of it, win or lose. Embrace every second of it! That was huge for me! To be in Las Vegas, Nevada with my mom, who is and always has been my biggest and loudest cheerleader no matter where I've come or will go!!!! She's there! Along with my family and the few friends' support that are along for the ride, really made me feel better about the outcomes.

To get back on track...this tournament really made me look back at when I started in 8th grade and how hard it was as a female wrestler starting off in middle school, the only female to wrestle my whole high school years on and off the mat; between health and medical pauses... I still won't give up on my final destination, wherever that may be.

All among the last 7 to 7-1/2 years of wrestling... this tournament in particular (along with Vegas 2022 and Fargo in 2021) really showed me how far I can go for myself, no matter who is in my



The most learned lesson over the past couple years was the concept of opportunity and taking chances, even when others view you as less-than or not good enough; take the opportunities that are available, enjoy the moments, learn from them, and keep going. You don't have to be the best in the room to participate, you just need to be at your best, and believe in your goals, even when others don't share that same vision...

Being brought in as an Assistant girls' high school coach for Montague Varsity Wrestling in 2022 season, I've been able to embrace the laughs and fulfillment of the sport of WRESTLING in many ways!!! I did some individual coaching pre-season, and we gained a state championship, first since 1989. In 2023 we held strong state placers in a world of great growth in numbers and strong competition. Learning some coaching techniques allowed me to extend my wings a bit and learn more that I would have never known without taking my life steps. I have much to learn as a team coach, yet, beyond being an extra body in the room grabbing details as I go, I look forward to equality in learning amongst the struggles in a man's sport, inclusion on every level, and exemplifying personal achievements for ALL athletes.

Wrestling is truly for anybody. It has always been my life choice of style and has gotten me through a lot in my everyday life, from my attitude waking up in the morning, to being able to feel secure with myself no matter who's on the outside looking in.

I could tell you all the negative (and there's much to be said), or about the things that could have happened but didn't, yet I'm satisfied. I'm happy, and learning new things every time I get on the mat....So shoutout to all the big time women Olympians and world champions, I'm happy you let this chihuahua in on the big dog mats, glad I was able to give a new challenge to offer as well.

As for the many girls out there who are wrestling or want to wrestle...it's not easy, but it sure is fulfilling to those who dare to dream big. Go for it.

Message for other news & info if you want!

I know I got very sidetracked in emotions trying to explain!

So much love,  
Samantha Shepherd

corner, even the shortsighted ones who fail to understand the growth of women's wrestling and deter these dreams...I TAKE the opportunities available, enjoy them, live through them and become a better athlete by being there and being involved.

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