

# 2 girl wrestlers part of growing state trend

By Ally Happ

Originally a boys' sport, sophomore Elisabeth Fuller-Long and freshman Carlie Jo Fusco are breaking gender boundaries as they wrestle for Durant High School this season. Both girls are part of a growing trend as Iowa high school wrestling has become a gender neutral sport.

"I am glad we are able to be a part of the growing female wrestling competitions," said Head Coach Casey Strub. The 2018-2019 season was even the first year Iowa held an all-girls state wrestling tournament in Waverly, Iowa.

This year, Fuller-Long and Fusco chose to go out for the team together, thinking it would be a great opportunity. Fuller-Long wrestles in the 126-pound weight class while Fusco wrestles in the 106-pound class for varsity. Both now join 480 girls wrestling statewide, according to Iowa USA Wrestling.

Fuller-Long grew up in a family full of wrestlers, always wrestling for fun at home with relatives. Her younger brother wrestles in the Cat Pack program, Durant's youth wrestling club, and her dad wrestled in high school.

Fusco, a leading runner on the girls' cross country team this fall, was eager to join the wrestling team to try something new.

The girls adapted to their new diet and are careful to eat healthier and smarter in order to stay in their weight class.

While being on a team full of boys, Fuller-Long and Fusco feel just like every other person on the team, as Coach Strub treats the girls the same as everyone else, teaching them escapes, takedowns, and

drills.

However, since girls tend to be more flexible, Fuller-Long and Fusco have been taught specific moves to use during matches against boys.

"Once you get used to [wrestling boys], it doesn't really matter," said Fusco about the gender difference.

Wrestling boys isn't uncomfortable for Fuller-Long as well, and she said she would be disappointed if a boy would forfeit a match to her or any girl.

"A girl knows what she is signing up for when she wrestles," said Fuller-Long.

Boys have forfeited matches in the past, and one of the first notable examples was highly ranked wrestler Joel Northrup of Linn-Mar High School during the 2011 State Tournament, according to ABC News.

He forfeited his first match to Cassy Herkelman of Cedar Falls and said in a statement, "As a matter of conscience and my faith I do not believe that it is appropriate for a boy to engage a girl in this manner," a news report said.

However, Coach Strub believes the girls will not face the issue of boys forfeiting to them in the future.

"The sport of wrestling has come a long way in the acceptance of female wrestlers, especially in the past few years. I am glad I can witness the change first hand in a positive way," said Coach Strub.

Sophomore Ethan Gast, who has wrestled his whole life, agreed.

"It's nice to see that Durant wrestling is a part of the change as major high schools have been doing it for awhile now," he said. The boys acknowledge the girls as



Photo by Ally Happ

Carlie Jo Fusco and Elisabeth Fuller-Long are competing on the boys' wrestling team this season.

teammates and aren't timid to practice with them.

Gast wrestles in the 120-pound weight class for varsity and is happy to see that Fusco can help the team by wrestling

in a lower varsity weight class that the boys can't necessarily fill.

As the season continues for the girls, they will also wrestle in a few girls' only meets.

## Wildcat softball team must find 3rd coach in 3 years

By Lucas Callison

The Durant softball team recently announced that Coach Kevin Kaalberg will not be returning for the 2020 season. The former head coach resigned in December and plans on coaching at the junior college level next year.

Coach Kaalberg finished his only season at Durant with a record of 27-9. At

the moment, the interim head coach is assistant coach and son of the former coach, Reid Kaalberg.

An impressive 2019 graduating class now has four of seven girls playing at the college level. The team started last year ranked #1 in Class 2A but lost in the district final game to Beckman Catholic at home, one win short of making the state tourna-

ment.

In the past, Durant softball was known for being guaranteed contenders at the state tournament, even capturing the state title in 2013 under Coach Steve Hopkins. However, the Wildcats have not made it to Fort Dodge in back-to-back years now.

Coach Hopkins was the head coach before Kaalberg and left the program after the 2018 season to coach softball at Muscatine High School. The softball program will now have its third head coach in three seasons. After coaching for a long while at Durant, Coach Hopkins built the legacy that is Durant softball, and that legacy could now be in jeopardy without an experienced head coach and the loss of talented players.

With three different head coaches in three years, the softball program is starting to resemble what the football program used to look like a decade ago. The football team

hit a rough patch in coaching turnover and also had three head coaches in three years, 2009-2011.

According to news articles from *The Muscatine Journal*, in 2008, Coach Barry Bower was hired until he resigned in 2010 with a 5-13 record in two seasons.

In 2010, Durant hired Coach Casey Bouska, and he took his team to the playoffs with a 5-5 record, but Coach Bouska would later resign after one season. From 2011-2016, Durant football had a record of 10-44.

Coach Joel Diederichs took over the football team three years ago, and he just missed making the state playoffs for the second year in a row last fall.

Senior softball players Kira Schult and Allie Poston think that the multiple coaching changes could impact the softball team's success.

"I feel like our program has suffered by not being able to consistently have one coach for the past several years," Schult said.

"I think it's a problem because it's hard to get used to one coaching style, and a lot of coaches try to change the way a player swings, and it can mess up the entire team," Poston said.

The new coaching change will likely impact younger players more than experienced players.

"I feel like the younger kids need help and consistency from a single coach, so they can develop and build as players," Poston said.

Is this the end of an era? Not so fast. This year's softball team, although rather young, has a lot of talented and experienced players hoping to finally make it back to the state tournament and create their own legacy.

"I expect the coach to come in ready to win some ball games and work hard at helping the team," Schult said.

### Hy-Vee Pharmacy's boys' basketball player of the month



Hy-Vee Pharmacy  
621 5th St., Durant, IA 52747  
563-785-4930

In the first five games of the season for the Wildcats, senior Marcus Engstler is averaging 5.8 points per game and 4.8 rebounds a game. Engstler also had seven steals in the Wildcats' home victory over West Liberty. He has recorded 14 steals altogether and 16 assists.



Engstler

### Wilton Cafe's bowler of the month



116 W. Fourth St., Wilton, IA 52778  
563-732-4115

Last season for the Wildcats, Cameron Hoon totaled 3,280 pins. The senior bowler also averaged around 182 pins per game and had a season-high game of 245 pins. Hoon has already matched that high game this season and looks to be a leader for the team as the Wildcats seek their third straight trip to state.



Hoon

### Tinted Vintage Iowa's wrestler of the month



120 W. 4th St., Wilton, IA 52778  
563-732-3110  
tintedvintageiowa@gmail.com  
www.tintedvintageiowa.com

Last season for the Wildcats, Kenny Salemi had a record of 18-20. Salemi comes into his sophomore year with a full year of varsity experience under his belt. Salemi wrestles at the weight class of 138 pounds and looks to have a good season after putting a lot of time in the weight room this offseason.



Salemi

### Apex Ink and Apparel's girls' basketball player of the month



708 5th St., Durant, IA 52747  
563-785-6223

Nicole Brown, a Durant High School junior, is second on the team in points with 7.3 points per game through three games. She is shooting 41% from the three-point line. In the season opener, Brown scored 16 points against Mid-Prairie.



Brown