

The Girl Who Wrestles Boys (and Wins!)

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The wrestlers at Sunnyside High School weren't sure what to think when a girl joined their team. Here's how Audrey Jimenez, 13, earned their respect—on the mat and off. BY MICHELLE CROUCH

VOCABULARY

lunged: moved forward suddenly

traditionally: typically or normally (often based on old-fashioned ideas)

determined: not letting anyone or anything stop you from doing something you want to do

international: made up of people or groups from different countries

demonstration: an act of showing someone how something is done



Audrey Jimenez, 13, eyed the boy standing in front of her. She darted left, then right—and then she **lunged** at the boy's knees and flipped him onto his back.

The boy dropped to the mat, pinned below her.

Although Audrey—who lives in Tucson, Arizona—is used to wrestling, people always stop and stare when they see her competing.

That's because wrestling has **traditionally** been a sport for boys. "They think I'm not going to be good, because I'm a girl," Audrey says, "but that just makes me

determined to prove them wrong."

A New Sport

Audrey first became interested in wrestling two years ago. She was taking jujitsu, a martial art similar to karate. Audrey learned from her jujitsu teacher that her favorite move, known as a takedown, was actually a wrestling move.

Around the same time, her older sister, Alyssa, became the manager of her high school's all-boys wrestling team. One day, she invited Audrey to go to a match with her. Audrey thought wrestling looked fun and competitive.

At that moment, Audrey decided she wanted to try it. She knew wrestling was typically a boys' sport, but that didn't bother her. She had grown up playing football with all her boy cousins.

Alyssa asked the coach if Audrey could come to a practice and try wrestling, and he agreed. Audrey was excited, but she was also nervous. Would the boys on the team accept her?

The Only Girl

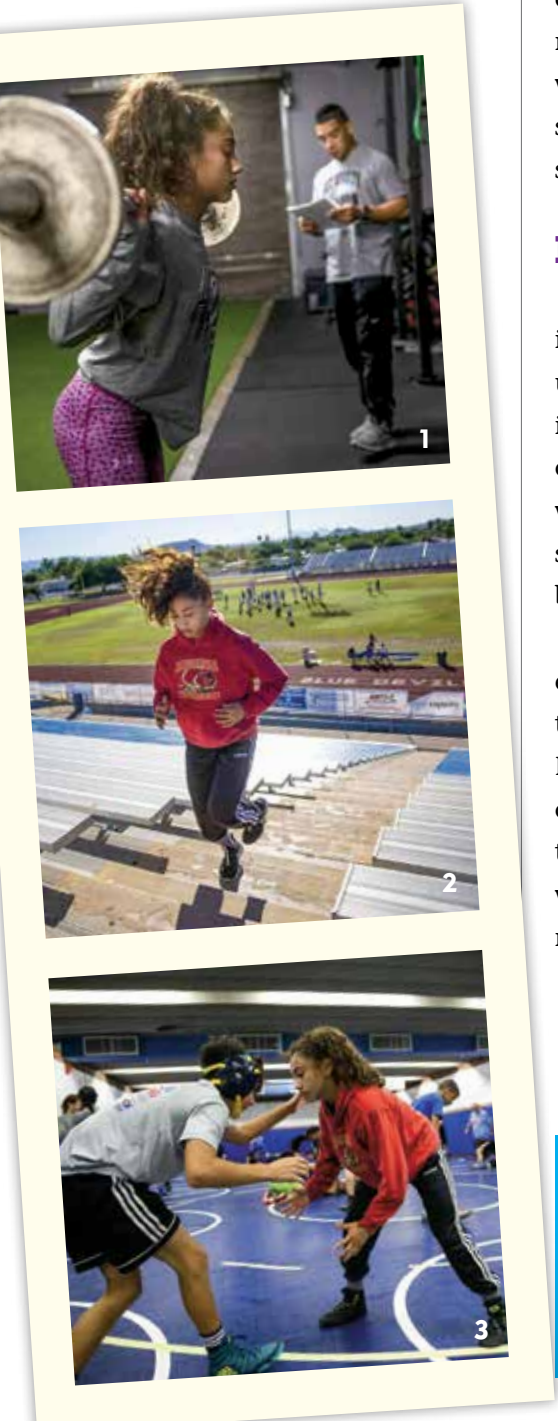
The first day at Sunnyside High School wrestling practice was the hardest. When Audrey walked in, the boys stared. The coach introduced her, but no



one came over to say hi.

Audrey tried not to take it personally. “If they didn’t want to talk to me, that was OK,” she says. “I was there to learn about wrestling.”

Over the next few months, Audrey worked hard. She woke



up at 5 a.m. to train, and she practiced with the boys after school. Every practice ended with a match against a teammate. The boys were all bigger and stronger than Audrey, so she usually lost.

But in tournaments (or competitions) Audrey was matched up against boys who weighed about the same as she did—and before long, she started winning.

National Champion

Most tournaments included only boys, so Audrey usually wrestled boys. But if a tournament had a girls’ competition, she entered that as well. Her skills improved, and she won medals in both the boys’ and the girls’ divisions.

Then last May, Audrey entered a women’s national tournament—and she won! It was her first national championship—but she refuses to take all the credit. “Wrestling with boys made me stronger and more competitive,” Audrey says.

Meanwhile, the boys on the team began to accept Audrey. They watched her wrestle and

advised her on how to improve. They invited her to hang out with them after practice. They even taught her to do a backflip.

When she finally perfected the move in the gym one day, they all cheered.

Inspiring Others

Last October, Audrey competed in her first **international** tournament. It was in Panama, a country in Central America. She won every match and brought home the gold.

This year, she hopes to make it to the 2020 world championships—and after that, she’ll aim for the 2024 Olympics. “I want to be the best,” she says.

Audrey is also working to get more girls involved in wrestling. Sunnyside High recently agreed to start a girls’ team. Audrey did a wrestling **demonstration** to get other girls interested in the sport.

But Audrey won’t practice with the girls’ team. She wants to keep wrestling with the boys, she explains, because their experience with the sport means she can learn a lot from them.

Plus, her teammates have become some of her closest friends. “We teach each other, and we help each other—in wrestling and in life,” she says. “We’re family now.” •

WORKING HARD

1. Audrey lifts weights to make herself stronger.
2. She also runs to improve her endurance.
3. Wrestling against boys at practice makes her better.