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Program companion website: www.pbs.org/girlwrestler

GIRL WRESTLER

INDEPENDENT LENS's "GIRL WRESTLER"

FOLLOWS THE BUMPY JOURNEY OF 13-YEAR OLD TEXAS TEEN TARA NEAL AS SHE PURSUES AN UNTRADITIONAL GIRLS SPORT—WRESTLING

Film by Diane Zander
Airs Nationally on "Independent Lens"
ITVS's Emmy® Award-Winning Series on PBS
Hosted by Susan Sarandon
Tuesday, December 14, 2004 at 10:00 P.M.
(check local listings)

(San Francisco, CA) — Tara is 13. She likes to hang out with her girlfriends, go to the mall… and wrestle. On her journey to the national championships, she battles critics who think it's wrong for girls to wrestle boys, struggles with her father's expectations for her performance, and fights with her own body to control her weight. **GIRL WRESTLER** will air nationally on the acclaimed PBS series ***Independent Lens*** on **Tuesday, December 14, 2004 at 10:00 P.M. (check local listings).**

Women's wrestling is in the news this year. In the 2004 Olympic games in Athens, it will be a featured sport for the first time. But for young women interested in pursuing the sport, challenges still abound. **GIRL WRESTLER** follows Tara Neal, a Texas teenager who rocks the establishment by insisting that girls and boys should be able to wrestle on the same mat. The film follows a crucial period in Tara's wrestling career—the last year that she is allowed to wrestle boys under state guidelines. Once she enters high school, her opportunities to compete will disappear. Because so few girls

choose to wrestle, and she won't be allowed to wrestle boys, Tara will have no one to wrestle with. From allegations of referee bias against girl wrestlers to coaches who proclaim their vehement hatred of Title IX (the federal statute that grants women's athletics proportionality in public schools), **GIRL WRESTLER** personalizes the clash of gender and sport and, in particular, the policy debates over Title IX. Tara navigates the same environment of hostility that produced the 2002 lawsuit filed by the National Wrestling Coaches Association against the Department of Education to repeal Title IX.

Over the course of the season, Tara faces off-the-mat challenges that will affect her wrestling career, from her body to her family. While boys who wrestle develop eating disorders on a much larger scale than non-wrestling boys, the pressure and consequences of dietary restrictions for girls who wrestle are perhaps even more significant, as their bodies are rapidly maturing and under such cultural scrutiny. During the course of the film, Tara experiments with fasting and running in the heat in order to lose weight, but eventually makes the healthy decision to accept her weight and compete at whatever weight she is. The documentary also chronicles her relationship with her divorced parents, as Tara struggles with her father's expectations and her increasing desire to become less dependent on her parents.

Tara's story becomes a personal prism through which to view such broader cultural issues as the socially accepted views of masculinity and femininity, athleticism and eating disorders, teenage identity, gender discrimination in organized athletics, and the meaning and value of sports in American culture. Ultimately, **GIRL WRESTLER** reveals the many challenges and pressures faced by young girls today as they seek to carve out a place in a culture full of conflicting messages about what it means to be a girl.

The companion website for **GIRL WRESTLER** (www.pbs.org/girlwrestler) features information on the history of Title IX and its impact on women's sports in America. The site also includes an update on some of the subjects featured in the film, Learn More links to resources on women in sports, girls' wrestling associations, and wrestling rules and strategies, video previews and a Talkback section for viewers to share their ideas and opinions.

GIRL WRESTLER Credits

Producer/Director/Cinematographer	**Diane Zander**
Editor	**Joanna Rabiger**
Advisors	**Janet Staiger, Ellen Spiro & Paul Stekler**

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

DIANE ZANDER (Producer/Director/Cinematographer)
An Emmy Award winner for her work on the documentary *Moving Stories*, Zander makes documentaries while teaching media production at the University of Texas at Austin. Her film and video work has been shown at festivals across North America and has appeared on *Image Union*, a Chicago PBS showcase for independent film and video. Zander has been honored with grants in support of her work from the Texas Council for the Humanities, Texas Filmmakers' Production Fund, Women in Film, the Liberace Foundation and the Caucus Foundation for Television Producers, Writers and Directors. Her previous work includes *Pretty as a Picture* (1999), *Beauty School* (1997) and *paternity is uncertain* (1997). The majority of her film and video work deals with gender and how female identities are constructed and complicated.

Zander served as an associate producer, writer and editor for WTTW/Chicago on *Moving Stories* and as a video journalist for CNN Headline News. She also has worked on numerous independent productions as a cinematographer, sound recordist and online editor. A summa cum laude graduate of Northwestern University with a degree in Radio-Television-Film, she received her Masters of Fine Arts degree in Film and Video Production at the University of Texas at Austin.

EPILOGUE

After joining her high school team and still not being allowed to practice with or wrestle against boys, Tara decided to leave the team. In 2004, Tara and her boyfriend Andrew had a baby daughter. Tara will finish high school in fall 2004, at an alternative school in Austin that accommodates teenage mothers.

GIRLS, WOMEN AND WRESTLING

Even though women wrestling may seem like a recent phenomenon, women have actually been wrestling since ancient times. Ancient inscriptions suggest that Spartan girls wrestled during Roman and Byzantine rule. In African tribes, pubescent girls often wrestled as part of their ritual initiation into womanhood. Among the Diola of Gambia, adolescent boys and girls wrestled, but not against one another. The male champion often married the female champion. Among the Yala of Nigeria and Njabi of Congo, men and women wrestled one another.

In the middle and late nineteenth century, Parisian artists sketched local women wrestlers and photographed them in their costumes. And, at the turn of the century, competing primarily in circus-like demonstrations, American women wrestled against one another in public bouts for the entertainment of the working class.

According to USA Wrestling, there are currently about 5,000 American girls who compete nationally on the high school level, compared to about 250,000 boys. Texas leads the nation with approximately 1500 girl wrestlers. Texas and Hawaii are the only states currently with state championships for girls wrestling at the high school level. They are also the only states that do not allow girls to wrestle boys at this level.

In 1996, the Texas Wrestling Officials Association voted to disband rather than officiate at matches where girls would wrestle boys. In reaction, the Texas University Interscholastic League has ruled that girls can only wrestle other girls at this level, thereby shrinking the possibilities for girl wrestlers to compete. Women's wrestling is undergoing an important test in 2004, when it will be a new sport in the 2004 Olympic games in Athens, Greece.

Despite repeated warnings of the medical dangers, "cutting weight" (rapid weight reduction) remains popular among amateur wrestlers. Methods used for rapid weight loss include severe dehydration, caloric restriction, diuretics, diet pills, laxatives, rubber exercise suits and vomiting. High school and collegiate wrestlers report "cutting" an average of four to five pounds in a week, while 20% of wrestlers lose as much as six to seven pounds in a week. One-third of wrestlers report repeating this practice more than ten times in one season.

Wrestlers traditionally lose weight for two reasons: to gain an alleged advantage over a smaller opponent, and/or to wrestle at a weight class that ensures that they don't have to compete with another team member. Weight cutting has significant adverse consequences that may affect competitive performance, health, and normal growth and development.

ABOUT TITLE IX

Adopted in 1972, Title IX states that "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance." One of the primary applications of the law is the selection of sports and competition levels in schools and colleges.

Since Title IX became law, the number of girls participating in high school sports has greatly increased. According to a June 2004 article in *The New York Times*, "In 1972, when Title IX was enacted by Congress, there were 295,000 girls participating in high school sports, or roughly one in twenty-seven. Now, there are more than 2.8 million girls, or approximately one in three." From 1981 to 1991, the total number of women's college teams increased by 66%. Because of Title IX, more women have received athletic scholarships and thus the opportunity for higher education than would have been possible otherwise.

Some critics of Title IX argue that the law has hurt opportunities for boys in traditionally male-dominated sports. The National Wrestling Coaches Association filed a lawsuit in 2002 against the Department of Education in an attempt to have Title IX repealed, alleging that Title IX has resulted in men's sports such as wrestling unfairly being cut at schools. In June 2003, a U.S. District Court dismissed the wrestling coaches' lawsuit. The National Wrestling Coaches Association is appealing the decision.

Enforcement of Title IX remains an issue for many schools. While colleges and universities have regular compliance checks, public middle and high schools do not. That Tara is not allowed to wrestle against or practice with boys in Texas is interpreted by some as a violation of the spirit of Title IX, although this practice is allowed because of a part of the law that allows gender segregation for contact sports. Tara's story is just one of a growing number of cases in which young girls continue to struggle with equal participation in sports. In fact, the number of complaints involving sex discrimination in middle and high schools—usually brought on because of the disparity in resources spent on girls teams vs. boys teams—has outpaced those involving colleges by five to one since 2001.

The Department of Education assembled the Commission on Opportunity in Athletics to take a fresh look at Title IX and its impact. In its final report, "Open to All: Title IX at Thirty," the commission concluded in 2003 that it found strong and broad support for Title IX, as well as continuing debate regarding how the law should be enforced.

ABOUT *INDEPENDENT LENS*

Independent Lens is an Emmy Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. Hosted by Susan Sarandon, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. ***Independent Lens*** features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history, which prompted Nancy Franklin to write in *The New Yorker*: "Watching ***Independent Lens***... is like going into an independent bookstore—you don't always find what you were looking for but you often find something you didn't even know you wanted." Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community outreach campaigns. Further information about the series is available at www.pbs.org/independentlens. ***Independent Lens*** is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts.

ABOUT ITVS

Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series ***Independent Lens*** on Tuesday nights at 10 P.M. on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting www.itvs.org. ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

ABOUT PBS

PBS is a private, nonprofit media enterprise that serves the nation's 349 public noncommercial television stations, reaching nearly 90 million people each week. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is the leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of educational services for adult learners. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online (pbskids.org), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at pbs.org, the leading dot-org Web site on the Internet. PBS is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia.

cpb ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American People.

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