

Case 14: Transition Move

Over 4,000 Texas high school girls are wrestlers, according to the National Wrestling Coaches Association. Texas is one of six states that host girls' state wrestling competitions, whereas (as of May 2017) thirty-nine states don't have separate tournaments for boys and girls but allow girls to wrestle against boys at state competitions. Texas state law, however, prohibits girls from wrestling on boys' teams. Texas University Interscholastic League (UIL) governs Texas athletic competitions, including wrestling, and, by UIL regulations, gender is determined by the athlete's birth certificate.

Born female, Mack Beggs began using testosterone in 2015 to transition from female to male. He wanted to wrestle as a boy, but could not because his birth certificate identified him as female. UIL rules allow the use of testosterone only when prescribed by a physician. After reviewing Mack's medical records, the UIL granted a medical exemption for the use of testosterone, but told him that if he wanted to wrestle, he must compete as a girl. Beggs requested to compete as a boy; the parents of some competitors claimed that testosterone gave him an unfair advantage over their daughters; and a lawsuit was filed, alleging that his opponents were at an increased risk of injury. Nevertheless, the UIL stood by its decision that Beggs must compete as a girl. Under pressure from parents, some potential opponents forfeited rather than wrestle against Beggs at the 2017 regionals. When he won the 2017 Texas High School Girls Wrestling Champion, his victory was both cheered and jeered.

Some criticize the UIL for inflexibly basing their decision on the birth certificate. Others criticize the UIL's lenience in allowing Beggs to compete at all while using testosterone. Some parents and teachers express anger at being forced to confront children's questions about gender identity. Others fault the state for creating an untenable situation for transgender students. Beggs is faulted by some for agreeing to compete with an unfair advantage. His supporters, however, claim that he was an excellent wrestler before starting testosterone, and that those who claim he has an unfair advantage are discounting his years of commitment and focused hard work. Some support his right to participate in activities available to all other students. Others claimed this right is not justified, as it is at the expense of the rights of every one of his opponents.

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