



# Athlete

## SPOTLIGHT

*Featured*

**Spectrum  
News 1**

*28<sup>th</sup> May 2024*

*Article:*

*Female Makes NC History in  
Wrestling Tournament*

*By Jennifer Roberts*



## Richelle Syer

9th Grade

Richelle Syer is a ninth-grader at Cannon School, a kindergarten through 12th-grade college preparatory school in Concord.

The school competes athletically in the NCISAA. Syer says Cannon School is a place where she feels among family. "I like the community. Everybody is very friendly and very welcoming and you feel at home," she said. Syer has become well known on campus for her dedication and accolades in sports.

"In the fall I do cross-country, in the winter I do wrestling, in the spring I do softball," she said. She says her love for athletics started at a young age.

"Ever since I was a kid, my parents put me in sports, mostly to learn teamwork and communication on the field, but as I grew older, I got more competitive with the sports," Syer said. "I just never quit."

Her hard work is paying off.

Last year, she made history on the campus as the first girl wrestler in Cannon School's history.

It was kind of hard at first because I was wrestling with boys, but I think that was a huge part in my step toward getting better." "I was in eighth grade," Syer said. "My brother had done wrestling for years, so I decided to come out for the team. It was kind of hard at first because I was wrestling with boys, but I think that was a huge part in my step toward getting better."

"Wrestling has grown a lot over the few years," she said. "As I saw more girls try it and start to like it, I decided to give it a shot because it had such a big influence in other girls' lives. I'm glad I did because it's been a huge part of my life."

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Weeks back, Syer stepped into the history books again, during the longest-running high school wrestling competition in the country.

Syer earned fourth place at the National Prep Tournament, marking the first time a girl wrestler representing a school in North Carolina has placed at the tournament.

Cannon School says Syer was also the only wrestler of any gender from a North Carolina school to place in the national preps since 2022.

“It was more of a competitive tournament than I ever been to,” Syer said. “It taught me how to go into these less competitive tournaments with the same mindset.”

Girls wrestling is the fastest-growing high school sport in the country, according to The Associated Press.

Cannon School director of girls and boys wrestling Solomon Fleckman says the growth in girls wrestling comes as no surprise.

“I’ve been a part of this sport since 1974,” Fleckman said. “I’ve had a girl on my team almost my entire life. They always had to wrestle other boys, and it wasn’t always pleasant for them at certain competitions because not everybody was accepting. Now, it’s popular. There are college opportunities.”

“You’re really seeing the men’s side of the sport not only embrace but help lead the girls’ side and help grow it regardless of gender,” he said.

Fleckman says Syer placing in the National Prep Tournament is a huge win for the state.

“For the state of North Carolina, typically we aren’t having as many place winners at the National Prep Tournament year after year as we would like to,” Fleckman said. “When you come from a high school schedule and you go to that particular tournament, at a certain point you’re going to be [competing with] some high-level kids. So for Syer to place in the top four is a big deal.”

Syer says she experienced some challenges entering this sport.

“In the eighth grade, I would wrestle boys in the duals. They definitely, I feel, looked at me differently than they would have any other boy wrestler, which is understandable because most of them had never seen a female in wrestling before. You would get underestimated a lot,” she said.

Now Syer is a leader on the mats.

She wants to encourage more young girls to take a chance on the sport.

“Definitely try this, you’re only going to get a few opportunities,” Syer said. “Though it might be awkward or hard at first, it’s going to pay off in the long run. And you’re going to get there if you keep grinding.”

Syer says she plans on competing in the sport at the college level.



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