



## University of Illinois “Illini for the Kids” Meet to Benefit IKWF

*Illinois Athletics, IKWF Join Forces for Fighting Illini Wrestling Season Opener on November 2*

**COUNTRY CLUB HILLS, Ill., October 9, 2023:** As part of a joint release with the University of Illinois Division of Intercollegiate Athletics and Fighting Illini Wrestling program, the Illinois Kids Wrestling Federation (IKWF) is excited to announce the “Illini for the Kids” Meet as a new event partnership. Scheduled for 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 2, at State Farm Center in Champaign, Ill., “Illini for the Kids” will feature Illinois against Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville (SIUE) in the Illini 2023-24 wrestling season opener.

The event will be ticketed and all net proceeds will benefit IKWF, a 501(c)(3) organization dedicated to growing the sport of boys and girls wrestling throughout the state. “Illini for the Kids” will be hosted in State Farm Center’s theater-style configuration, showcasing the matches on a stage with spotlights and other lighting features. All seating will be on the west side and fans should enter through the main west entrance.

“Alongside terrific partners like the University of Illinois, IKWF is proud to shine a light on the importance of youth wrestling,” said **Jim Considine**, IKWF president. “We’re grateful to the Illinois Division of Intercollegiate Athletics and the Illini Wrestling program for providing IKWF with this incredible platform. “Illini for the Kids” represents a special opportunity for youth wrestling in Illinois, and we want to pack the State Farm Center on Nov. 2 to celebrate!”

Ticket prices are \$10 for adults and \$5 for students, and can be purchased at [FightingIllini.com](https://fightingillini.com). All UI students get free admission with their ICard. Parking is free for all fans.

IKWF’s wrestling imprint in Illinois spans more than five decades, including many current and former Illini wrestlers and coaches who have supported IKWF programs.

“The IKWF holds a special place in my heart. While in elementary school, I idolized the IKWF state champions, dreaming of one day being part of the grand march and competing on the stage for the State Finals,” said **Mike Poeta**, Illinois wrestling head coach. “I’m confident there’s no other wrestling organization in the country as prestigious and well-organized as the IKWF. Its influence has undeniably contributed to Illinois’ success at the NCAA level. Knowing that this dual meet can support the IKWF fills me with pride. It has given me so much, and this is our way of giving back.”

From downstate to Chicago, IKWF serves kids wrestling across all 102 counties in Illinois with annual activities that include: growing membership and club participation; sanctioning events for club teams to help drive local revenue and club sustainability; diversifying programs to grow audience and participant base; administering IL/USA Wrestling and Illinois Girls Wrestling activities; operating premier state and national events; and aligning Illinois’s kids initiatives with the U.S. Center for SafeSport and USA Wrestling standards. For more information, visit [IKWF.org](https://ikwf.org).

**About 2023-24 Illinois Wrestling:** Illinois wrestling returns four NCAA qualifiers for the 2023-24 season. Redshirt junior Edmond Ruth (174 lbs.) and redshirt sophomore Dylan Connell (184 lbs.) qualified for 2023

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*Page 2 of 2, University of Illinois "Illini for the Kids" Meet to Benefit IKWF*

NCAA Championships. Ruth held a 20-match win streak from Nov. 5, 2022 to Jan. 28, 2023, which was the longest active in-season streak of the year. Connell outscored his opponents 14-0 in his wrestlebacks at the Big Ten Championships to place ninth and secure his spot at NCAAs. Local products redshirt senior Justin Cardani (125 lbs., Champaign Centennial) and redshirt junior Luke Luffman (285 lbs., Urbana) make their returns to the lineup after missing the 2023 season due to injuries. Both qualified for the 2022 NCAA Championships. Visit [Illinois Wrestling](#) for more information.

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