

Lauren Walton Awarded 2024 Michael Jackson Scholarship



By Bill Caine – Woodford Sun Sports

Lauren Walton, a recent Woodford County High School graduate, the KHSAA girls' state wrestling champion, and the Most Outstanding Wrestler, has been named the Michael Jackson Wrestling Scholarship recipient.

Walton, an All-American, said that she was honored to receive the award because she's heard many stories of Jackson's legacy in the WCHS wrestling room and knows how special he was to the school's program.

"I knew Michael was an amazing wrestler, and my coaches told us quite a few stories about him, especially when we needed a pep talk," said Walton. "I am grateful that the scholarship board views me in the same light because I want to be known as someone who worked hard, competed with everything she had, and was also a good student. This award is different because it speaks about the athlete, the student, and the citizen, and it makes me feel great to be recognized for that."

The annual scholarship is dedicated to Jackson's memory as a terrific wrestler, student, and leader on and off the mat for WCHS. Each year, the board receives applications for the award and looks for the best candidates based on integrity, determination, leadership, and grades.

Michael Jackson Scholarship board member Randy Cotton said that he and Michael's mother Debbie found many similarities between Jackson and Walton and was thrilled to be part of adding her name to the distinguished list of winners.

"Lauren has done more for women's sports than anyone I can think of when it comes to Woodford County athletics," said Cotton. "She is going to go down in the books as a trailblazer for women's sports, and girls are always going to look up to her. She gave them a standard to work toward, and I hope girls everywhere strive to be as great as Lauren has been. She is committed and has the desire to continue to get better. Women's wrestling is the fastest-growing sport in the country, and with someone like Lauren as an ambassador, kids will want to be great like her."

Walton's coach for more than a decade at the Carr Wrestling Academy, Joe Carr Sr. talked about Walton's intensity on the mat and how her ability to be coached helped her grow as a competitor.

"Lauren was always aggressive on the mat, even as a little girl, but by the time she hit middle school, we knew that she was going to be special and make a name for herself," said Carr. "She is a hard worker, intense in practice, and very coachable. She is goal-oriented, and that helped her meet the goals of state and national champions. We were blessed to be part of her journey. "Like Michael, Lauren was always ready to wrestle and knew exactly what to do once she was on the mat. She grew up wrestling boys, which made her stronger and more prepared. She is a special wrestler."