

Virginia Commonwealth Game's 2025 Youth Athlete of the Year Building Quite an Athletic Resume.

Priya Capizzi has a packed trophy case, a board full of medals and a lengthy list of accomplishments testifying to her selection as Youth Athlete of the Year for Virginia. What's more impressive is the fact she's still only 11 years old.

That's right, 11. She turns 12 in May. And already she has five Virginia state championships in power tumbling, well on her way to a sixth because as a Level 9 power tumbler, there's simply no one in the state who's at her level of competition. Three regional titles also bear Priya's name.

Power tumbling is a gymnastics discipline where athletes perform explosive, consecutive acrobatic maneuvers such as flips, somersaults, and twists, on a 25-meter elevated spring runway. It does not use apparatus like bars, beams, or vaults. Priya's specialty is TNT – trampoline and tumbling.

"I was so good at flipping at a young age that my coach said TNT would be good for me," she said.

Priya's father, David Capizzi, said she was able to do a standing backflip at age 5.

Clearly, Priya was a prodigy. Yet something else pulled at her. She had other interests.

"Artistic gymnastics is what most people think of, is something that takes 20-plus hours a week," David said. "We wanted her to be able to compete in other sports."

While exploring other sports, including jujitsu, a friend suggested wrestling.

"We came to the wrestling club, and I found that I liked it because it was so much more aggressive," Priya said.

Turns out, the thrill of an explosive tumbling run of six flips and a dismount pale to the joy of physically dominating an opponent, one-against-one.

"I knew I could progress in wrestling more than I could in jujitsu," she said.

Schools have wrestling teams and women's wrestling is gaining popularity. The Virginia High School League officially sanctioned girls' wrestling as a varsity sport last May, making



this year the first time it's offered. NCAA member schools are also adding women's wrestling as a collegiate sport.

While Priya is a few years away from attending Robinson High School in her home of Fairfax County, she has already charted the path of success. She is affiliated with USA Wrestling, which sanctions events for youth who are coming up in the sport.

At the 2025 Commonwealth Games, Priya won two gold medals and dominated her division with an 8-0 record, winning seven matches by pinning her opponent in under a minute. She did not suffer so much as a takedown. Four of her opponents were boys and four were girls. She hopes to repeat her powerful performance this summer with a return to the Commonwealth Games.

Priya is a two-time Virginia Amateur Wrestling Association Girls Folkstyle State Champion and a USA Wrestling national finalist, achievements that underline a rapid learning curve and a willingness to test herself against the best available competition. She often competes in girls' and boys' divisions.

In an era where young athletes are pressured to pick one sport, David Capizzi and his wife Shamala emphasize a broader approach.

"The challenge she has is she is split between wrestling and gymnastics, 50 percent of the week for each, where most kids, they competed at a national level, are focused on one sport. So, I've always thought it was important to develop an athlete," David said. "Eventually, she'll find what she really wants to do full time longer, but I've always been impressed that she can train half the time as other athletes but still competed at national level. She's not winning at a national level, but she's placing at a high, high, high area, which is to me has always been kind of what I wanted to be able to see."

The Capizzi family understands the value of physical fitness, effort, and discipline. David and Shalala both served in the Marine Corps and both were athletes.

By being named Virginia's Youth Athlete of the Year, Priya was nominated for the National Youth Athlete of the Year. The athletes' bio along with their accomplishments in the State Games will be considered and the national winner will be presented with their award in Birmingham, Alabama, in October.

Priya is also eligible to participate in the State Game of America this summer at Penn State.

Until then, look for Priya to be wrestling again this summer in the Commonwealth Games of Virginia,

Even as the accolades pile up, Capizzi and her family emphasize service and community. She volunteers at athletic events and helps with annual fundraisers — the same volunteer

ethos that powers the Commonwealth Games themselves — and talks about being a visible example for girls who want to wrestle.