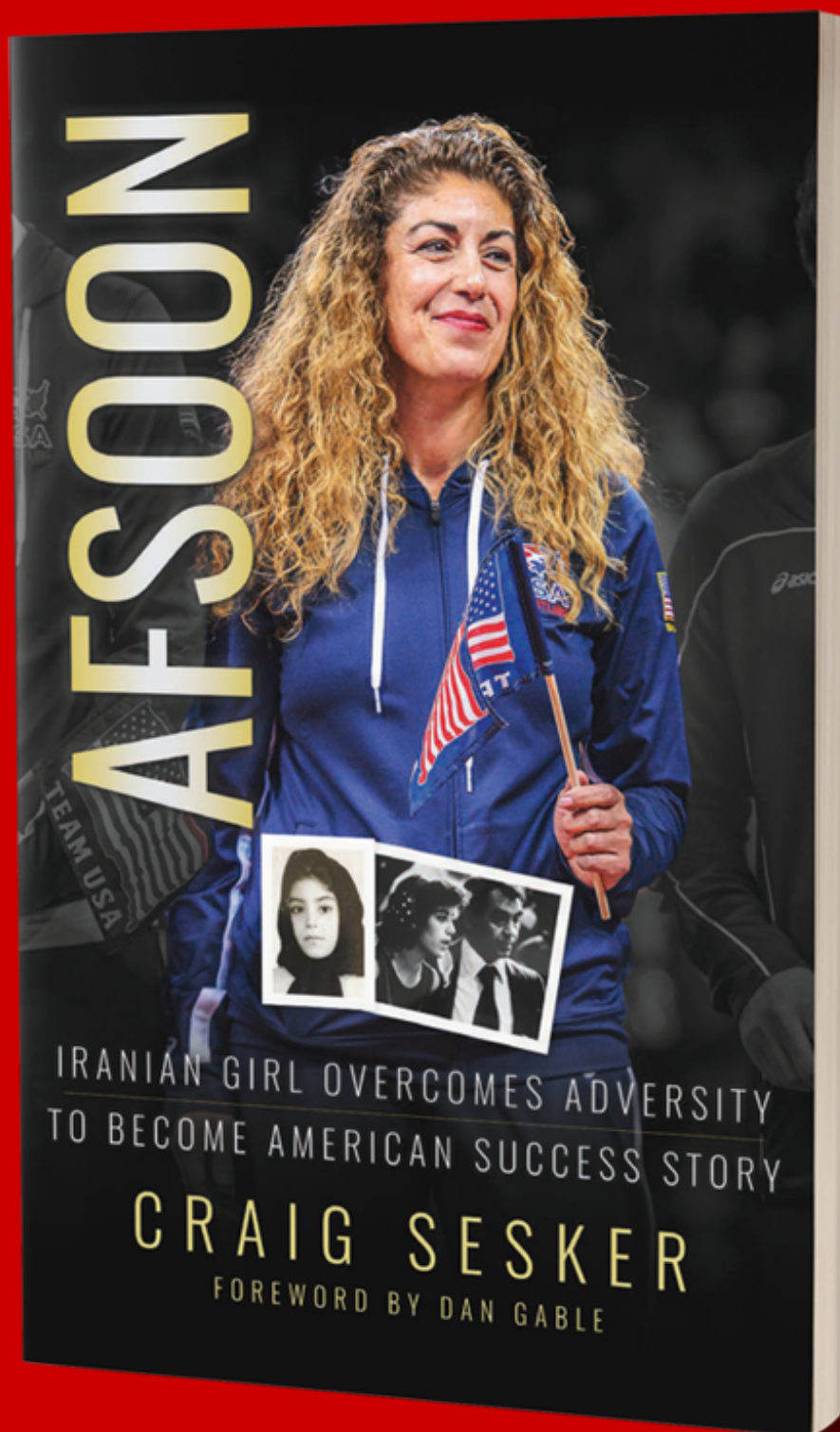


READING GROUP GUIDE

AFSOON

by: Craig Sesker



**COMPELLING QUESTIONS FOR
BOOK CLUB DISCUSSIONS**

Chapter	Questions & Conversation Starters
Forward	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why do you think Dan Gable was skeptical about women’s wrestling when he was initially exposed to it? 2. Dan Gable mentions that boys were much more advanced compared to girls in the beginning. How do you think the level of wrestling impacted how the girls were treated? 3. Mike Duroe, a wrestling mentor and coaching colleague of Dan Gable, showed interest in women’s wrestling, piquing Dan Gable’s interest. Dan’s impression of women’s wrestling changed because he saw someone he respected getting directly involved with females in the sport. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What can the wrestling community learn from this? b. How can you use your influence to inspire others to support other groups of people trying something that society may consider taboo or untraditional?
1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When male wrestlers have children, do they hope to have boys? How does this answer impact how their daughters may be treated? 2. What aspects of Manu’s life enabled him to think so progressively about women’s wrestling? 3. When Afsoon and her family lived in Iran, it was a very scary time filled with war, conflict and a government that told their citizens lots of lies about the outside world. What are some things you got to enjoy in your childhood that Afsoon was not able to due to her country’s government? 4. Is there anything similar to the situation in Iran going on in the world currently?
2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What would it feel like to live in a country where human rights are suddenly stripped away? 2. How would you respond to being forced to wear a hijab? 3. Do you think that the scary situation that many Iranian children grew up in- with constant risk of bombings, electricity blackouts and a total lack of freedom- had long-term impacts that affected them as they became adults? 4. Do you think that when the Iranian children chanted “Death to America,” that they actually hated the United States?
3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why were the punishments for speaking out against the new regime so severe? 2. Why were intellectual, forward thinkers targets for the new regime? 3. Afsoon’s Aunt Shila stood up for her beliefs, which resulted in her being put in jail. Which of your beliefs do you feel so

	<p>strongly about that you would risk being put in prison?</p> <p>4. What made the guard at the prison feel like he could harass or interrogate Jila? Why would he do that?</p>
4	<p>1. What did Iran have to gain by making it hard for people to leave the country?</p> <p>2. Afsoon's family risked everything to make it to the United States of America. Why do you think they made this choice? What in your life is worth risking everything for?</p>
5	<p>1. Is it okay to break the law for any reason?</p> <p>2. Manu made sacrifices for his family. What sacrifices do we make in wrestling? What sacrifices do we make in life?</p> <p>3. It took Manu months of traveling to different countries across Europe to get a visa. He had to be very persistent despite repeated denials from the passport agents. What ways do you show persistence and resilience in wrestling?</p>
6	<p>1. Afsoon spoke no English when she first came to the US. Because of her nationality, language and cultural differences, she felt isolated from her peers, but her natural ability in sports helped her to be accepted.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a. Have you ever felt isolated or not accepted from those around you? What helped you to find a place where you fit in?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">b. How can you be more accepting of the people around you that are different from you?</p> <p>2. One of Afsoon's first encounters was with a young boy who told her she was a terrorist after she said that she was Iranian. How do you think that such a young child formed a hateful idea like this? Do you think this is similar to the way that the Iranian children chanted "Death to America" before school everyday?</p> <p>3. When Afsoon started school in the U.S. she was educated in a co-ed environment for the first time. What are the advantages or disadvantages of learning in a co-ed environment?</p> <p>4. Little by little, Afsoon's family "wrestled back" and built a new life. What character traits would make a comeback like this possible?</p> <p>5. Do you think Afsoon and her family missed Iran, even though their life there was terrible?</p>
7	<p>1. Afsoon's father believed she could be a good wrestler from a very young age, even though girls were not allowed to wrestle in Iran. Who in your life believes that strongly in you? How can you support other people in your life and show the same belief in them?</p> <p>2. When inquiring about whether or not she could join her high</p>

	<p>school wrestling team, Afsoon's first coach told her, "I can't legally stop you." How would you have reacted if you heard that?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Marco Sanchez had a huge impact on Afsoon's journey in sport by suggesting she try out for the wrestling team. As well, Afsoon's father played a huge role in convincing the coaches that she deserved a place on the team. Why is having strong male supporters in female sports important? 4. The practices at Afsoon's high school were really challenging, but she refused to quit no matter how tiring and tough they were. Do you think the hardships that Afsoon had to go through in her childhood helped make these practices seem easier? 5. The media seemed to latch onto the story of a girl wrestling a boy. Is this still a popular narrative in the media coverage of girls wrestling? 6. Afsoon's journey in the sport of wrestling is compared to a roller coaster ride. Is this a fair comparison? Why or why not?
8	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Even though a lot of people told Afsoon that she could not wrestle because she was a girl, she did anyway. And while it took her a long time to find success, she finally won a match by technical superiority against a boy in her first match of her sophomore year. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Have you ever done something and succeeded even when the odds are stacked against you? What do you need to do to be successful even if others think you can't do it? b. Boys: have you ever been excluded or told not to do something because of your gender? How did this make you feel? 2. Afsoon gained acceptance on her high school team after she started to win. Is that how it should be? 3. The length of Afsoon's hair proved to be a barrier at different times in her career. What are the barriers that hold back female wrestlers today? 4. Afsoon felt really touched when her teammate, Victor, gave her an "Independence HS Wrestling" t-shirt. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. What does Victor giving Afsoon the t-shirt symbolize? b. What can you do to make others in your life feel welcome and valued in the space that they're in? 5. Can wrestlers truly be themselves in the sport? Do stereotypes or stigmas still exist today? Are there certain physical or social expectations for wrestlers?
9	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When boys wrestle girls people will often say it's a "no win" situation for the boy. What does this mean? Is it fair or

	<p>reasonable to say this? If not, what should the messaging be?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Did boys stepping up to wrestle girls help contribute to the growth of female wrestling? Do we still need boys to wrestle girls? 3. Afsoon stayed positive even when people treated her badly (phone calls). How important is it to have a group of supportive people to turn to when things get tough? 4. Afsoon was someone that her coaches and teammates wanted to be around. Think about a teammate that you like to be around. What makes them someone you want to spend time with? 5. Some people were really upset about the fact that Afsoon, a girl, wrestled- to the point they would call her house or say horrible things about her. Even USA Wrestling didn't fully support the women at the time- they didn't provide financial funding for women on the way to the World Championships. What helped Afsoon keep going even when it felt like the whole world was against her? How can you stay positive even when other people try to drag you down?
10	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Afsoon idolized John Smith. Do you have a wrestler you aspire to be more like? 2. Does a coach's opinion on girls wrestling trickle down to the male athletes that they work with? 3. Why is visibility important for the growth of women's wrestling? 4. Eventually, Afsoon met and became very close with fellow wrestler, Marie Ziegler. Is it helpful for female wrestlers to have female friends in the sport? Why or why not?
11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. When Afsoon first started wrestling, the Iranian men refused to watch her at the World Championships. Why do you think it was so heart-wrenching for Afsoon to be rejected by the Iranian people in this way, even though Iran was a terrifying place for her and she now competed for America? 2. At international tournaments, the Iranians wouldn't openly give Afsoon support, but indicated through whispers that they wished her well. Have you ever experienced people not willing to openly support you and your choice to wrestle? 3. Afsoon took her good luck charm, Rabbity, to several wrestling events. Do you have any good luck charms that you use? 4. Did the 1989 World Championships have elements that were sexist towards women?
12	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Before meeting Afsoon, Byron pictured what a female wrestler would look like. What were his assumptions? Are these stereotypes still around today?

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Byron was very supportive of Afsoon's wrestling career. What character traits do you think a supportive partner needs to possess? What are some of the challenges that come along with balancing personal friendships and relationships when you have big goals in wrestling?
13	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Afsoon had to sit back and watch the Olympics and while she was excited for the women competing, she struggled with not having had the opportunity herself. Have you lived through a similar experience where you've had to watch a younger generation of wrestlers get opportunities you didn't have?
14	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> After having her first son, Afsoon was eager to get back into wrestling from a coaching/leadership perspective, but she soon realized how challenging that would be with a small baby at home. Are we doing enough to support options for women with young children to stay involved with the sport? Afsoon stepped away from the sport for over a decade. How do you think the time she spent away from the mat impacted her relationship with wrestling and her life as a whole? Terry Steiner took the time to get to know Afsoon. He showed her the utmost respect and worked to make sure that the senior level women knew her story. Why is it important that we educate young wrestlers on the history of our sport? Are we doing enough to make sure everyone knows this history? Afsoon's perspective as a female coach added a different layer of support to the senior level athletes. Why is it important for women to coach female athletes? Can they offer the same benefits to male athletes? How can the wrestling community better support the growth of females in both coaching and leadership positions within the sport of wrestling?
15	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Afsoon's daughters and other young women have had the chance to see her in a high profile coaching position. How important is it for the next generation of wrestlers to see women in leadership positions within the sport of wrestling? What qualities does a successful coach have?
16	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> In 2016, Afsoon was selected to be a coach at the Olympic Games in Rio. Do you think that this experience helped her achieve her Olympic dream in a different way?
17	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Afsoon finally made it to the Olympics, not as an athlete, but as a coach. Has there ever been a time in your life when you had to put aside your highest aspiration and accept or embrace the

opportunities that were available to you?

2. Afsoon was a big part of the movement that has resulted in girls and women now being allowed to wrestle in Iran. How was she able to have such a big impact despite being an ocean away? Can you have an impact on the lives of other people living across the world?
3. The sport of wrestling grew Afsoon as a person in many different ways. It made her physically and mentally tougher, introduced her to a fantastic community of people and helped shape her into the fantastic wife, mother, coach, friend and women's wrestling advocate that she is today.
 - a. How has wrestling grown you into the person you are today?
 - b. How can you use wrestling to continue to develop yourself as a person and become an even better version of the person you already are?