Perfected by girls

Melinda Radford is a pretty typical teen age girl. She loves designer clothes, hanging out with her best friend and participating in school sports. Trouble is, her sport is wrestling, and she’s the only girl on the school’s championship wrestling team. She gets crude comments from classmates, and members of opposing teams refuse to wrestle with her. But she hangs on because she really loves the sport. Off the mat she has the usual teenage girl problems—her best friend and her older brother are making eyes at each other, and her grandmother insists on a boring summer internship at her company for Melinda. And then to top it off, her mother forbids her to see her hot new boyfriend! What’s a girl to do? Melinda has to navigate the normal pitfalls of high school with the added burden of being the lone girl in a boys’ sport. Her situation turns even uglier when she makes an off-hand comment to a writer who turns out to be a reporter for the local newspaper, and she’s seen as not being a team player or supportive of her coach. The article causes a bad situation to turn even uglier, but by the end of the story, when Melinda starts to question her commitment to the sport, she gets a surprise chance to move from the JV to the varsity team and really compete instead of warm the bench. The story has an authentic female voice and shows the loneliness of being the sole girl on the team—the lack of dressing facilities, the opposing teams that forfeit rather than wrestle with her, the ugliness of some of the fans. At one point Melinda attends a girls’ wrestling clinic held at a local college and she, along with the reader, gets a much better picture of the world of female wrestling. Readers will empathize with Melinda’s isolation throughout the school day, although some may tend to gloss over the detailed wrestling descriptions, especially if they aren’t familiar with the sport. But the romance and other aspects of Melinda’s life will outweigh the unfamiliar parts of the story. It should strike a chord with girls, even those who don’t participate in athletics.