

# PENNSYLVANIA WRESTLING NEWSMAGAZINE

## 2024 PARIS OLYMPIC TRIALS: 2 PA NATIVES + AARON BROOKS QUALIFY



Above: Zain Retherford, red, of NLWC (Titan Mercury WC) downs Jesse Mendez of Ohio State RTC (Titan Mercury WC) 3-2 in Challenge Semis at 65 kg (143 lbs)

Senior Dillon Bechtold, of Owen J. Roberts HS, won the Schalles PA Pinner Award...Story on page 6  
Violette Lasure of Chestnut Ridge wins the Schalles PA Pinner Award for Girls...story on pg 19



Above: Aaron Brooks (R) defeats 2021 gold medalist David Taylor at 90 kg to earn '24 Olympic team bid for the Paris Games



ABOVE: Spencer Lee (Iowa) (Franklin Regional) (57KG, 125 lbs), defeated Thomas Gilman (Iowa) (NLWC), 6-3 and earned a fall in the second match to make his first Olympic Team. Photos by Tom Elling

2024 PENNSYLVANIA  
WRESTLING  
NEWSMAGAZINE  
MAY 2024



## U.S. OLYMPIC TEAM TRIALS



**Above:** Jason Nolf (red), a former 3x NCAA champion from Penn State took out 6x World Champ and 2012 Olympic Gold medalist Jordan Burroughs 3-0 to reach the finals of the Olympic Trials at 74 kg. vs. Kyle Dake. Dake, however, beat Nolf twice to make the US Olympic Team. Dake was a 4x NCAA champion at Cornell who won at 4 different weight classes and never red-shirted in college!

*Olympic Trials Photos are courtesy of Tom Elling*



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**\*\*NOTE: OUR NEXT ISSUE WILL COME OUT in November/December of 2024...Enjoy the Summer!**

**Design/Layout by** Troy Baranik, Columbia College, SC -  
Sports Info. Director  
**All Olympic Trial photos by** Tom Elling  
**HS/PSU photos by** Marc Billett



## Crowd from the Olympic Team Trials at the BJC

Nearly 16,000 fans watched the Olympic Trials at Penn State's Bryce Jordan Center. It was the first time the trials were held at Penn State.





## Olympic Team Trials Final Results

### Men's Freestyle

- \*57 kg (125 lbs) - **Spencer Lee** over Thomas Gilman 6-3, Fall 5:58
- \*65 kg (143) - **Zain Retherford** over Nick Lee 2-1, 5-0
- 74 kg (163) - **Kyle Dake** over Jason Nolf 4-1, 3-1
- 86 kg (189.5) - **Aaron Brooks** over David Taylor 4-1, 3-1 (*pictured below*)
- 97 kg (213) - **Kyle Snyder** over Isaac Trumble 5-0, 4-0
- 125 kg (275.5) - **Mason Parris** over Hayden Zillmer 7-0, 7-0

### Women's Freestyle

- 50 kg (110 lbs) - **Sarah Hildebrandt** over Audrey Jimenez 10-0, 10-0
- 53 kg (116.8) - **Dom Parrish** over Haley Augello 2-1, 5-3
- 57 kg (125) - **Helen Maroulis** over Jacarra Winchester Fall 2:41, 6-0
- 65 kg (143) - **Kayla Miracle** over Macey Kilty 8-5, 4-1
- 68 kg (150) - **Amit Elor** over Forrest Molinari 6-0, 2-1
- 76 kg (167.5) - **Kennedy Blades** over Adeline Gray 11-6, 8-3

### Greco-Roman

- \*60 kg (132 lbs) - **Dalton Roberts** over Ildar Hafizov 2-0, 1-10, 3-2
- \*67 kg (147) - **Ellis Coleman** over Alex Sancho 1-1, 2-0, 3-2
- \*77 kg (169) - **Kamal Bey** over Aliksander Kikinou 9-1, 6-0
- 87 kg (191.8) - **Payton Jacobson** over Spencer Woods 8-2, 2-5, 3-1
- 97 kg (213) - **Joe Rau** over Alan Vera 1-7, 6-0, 8-0
- 130 kg (286.6) - **Adam Coon** over Cohlton Schultz 1-3, 1-1, 6-1

### \*Olympic Wrestling Schedule in Paris, France:

**Women's Freestyle**- August 5-6 (68 kg), August 6-7 (50 kg), Aug. 7-8 (53 kg), Aug. 8-9 (57 kg), Aug. 9-10 (62 kg), Aug. 10-11 (76 kg).

**Men's Freestyle**: August 8-9 (57 kg & 86 kg), Aug. 9-10 (74 kg & 125 kg), Aug. 10-11 (65 kg & 97 kg)

**Men's Greco-Roman**: August 5-6 (60 kg & 130 kg), Aug. 6-7 (77 kg & 97 kg), Aug. 7-8 (67 kg & 87 kg)





## More NCAA Wrestling News & Notes

\***Mason Gibson**, who originally committed to wrestle at Penn State has changed his mind and will now wrestle at Rutgers. Gibson (133) placed 4th in the PIAA State Tournament and won his bout against the USA All-Stars in the Pittsburgh Wrestling Classic.

\***Ayden Sinclair** of Edgerton, Wisconsin is the **2024 national winner of the Dave Schultz High School Excellence Award**. The Schultz Award was established in 1996 to honor Olympic and World champion **Dave Schultz**, whose career was cut short when he was murdered in January of 1996. The Award is given by the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, of which Dave is a Distinguished Member (1997). The Award recognizes and celebrates the nation's most outstanding high school senior wrestlers for their excellence in wrestling, academics, citizenship, and community service. Sinclair was a 3x Wisconsin state champion for Milton HS and cards a career record of 144-4. He won the Super 32 and was a Fargo champion. He will attend the University of Missouri in the fall. Some of the past winners include **Jake Varner, Logan Stieber, Coleman Scott, David Taylor and Zain Retherford**.

\***Pierson Manville** of State College HS, pictured below, was the **Schultz Award** State Winner from Pennsylvania. Manville was a 3x PIAA State finalist and a state champion. He will attend Arizona State University in the fall.

\***AJ Schopp (Tyrone)** has decided to leave his post as an assistant coach at Purdue to come back to his alma mater, Edinboro, and serve as the head assistant coach. Schopp was a 3x All-American. He placed 3rd at the NAAs in 2015, where he wrestled all the way back in the consolations (7 straight, including 4 pins), to help the Fighting Scots place third as a team behind Ohio State and Iowa.

\***Aaron Brooks** led the Nittany Lion Team with 96 takedowns this season. He gave up Zero; **Beau Bartlett**, 141, led the Penn State squad with 7 pins this year while **Mitchell Mesenbrink**, 165, of PSU earned the most team points this year with 119.

\***Four members of the Pitt Panther Wrestling Team** were selected to the 2024 All-ACC Academic Wrestling Team: Sophomore Luca Augustine (Waynesburg), freshman Jared Keslar (Connellsville), Vinnie Santaniello and Finn Solomon (Franklin Regional).

\***Oklahoma State** set the programs average attendance record with 5,871 per dual. The Cowboys also had their first sell out at Gallagher-Iba Arena in five years.

\*NC State set a record this year as they produced three sell-outs for wrestling this year in their 5,300 seat Reynolds Coliseum.

\***Cam Amine (165)**, a 3x All-American at Michigan is transferring to Oklahoma State for his last year of competition in 2024-25.

\***PSU's Roman Bravo-Young (133)** has made the Olympic Team for Mexico at 57 kg. Penn State will now have **Retherford, Brooks and RBY** as alumni in the Paris Olympics.

\***Mason Parris**, the 2023 NCAA champion at 285 and the Hodge Trophy Winner told NBC, "It feels like destiny, I am 24 years old and it's the 2024 Olympics, and it's Parris in Paris!"



**Pictured right** are two Altoona HS grads **Rodger Seemiller & Johnny Orr** at the Olympic Trials in State College. Orr was a 2x NCAA runner-up for Princeton while Seemiller wrestled at Maryland.





## Dillon Bechtold Wins Schalles PA Pinner Award

by Joe Baranik

PIAA 3A State Champion Dillon Bechtold (215) went 42-0 this season for the Owen Roberts HS Wildcats and produced 36 pins to win the Wade Schalles Pennsylvania Pinner Award. It is presented by PWN and sponsored by the Pittsburgh Trophy Company.

Bechtold earned 36 pins out of 40 bouts wrestled (two were forfeits) for a 90% pin percentage. He amassed 83 career falls and had a career record of 129-12. Bechtold pinned Caleb Marzolino of Abington Hts. in the state finals in 3:57. In fact, in all but two matches this year, Dillon earned either a pin or a tech fall!

Bechtold was a state runner-up last year after being taken down by Sonny Sasso, who now wrestles at Virginia Tech. He placed 5th as a sophomore. His brother Dean was a state runner-up this year as a sophomore, which helped Owen J. Roberts to their highest finish at states, placing 5th. Their Dad, Dan Bechtold, wrestled in college as well at West Chester.

"I feel I have a good pace in my matches and try to wear down my opponents before pinning them," Dillon stated. "I almost want my foes to give up and want to be pinned. My favorite pinning combination is from the top position, sort of like a reinforced chicken wing."

Bechtold said he is fortunate that he has two great workout partners in his brother Dean and Tucker Hogan, who just won his second state championship for

Daniel Boone High School.

"He has impeccable character and sets the tone for all the high school kids down to the youth program with his work ethic, in the classroom and in the community," his high school coach, Steve Derafelo told PWN. "He is a special kid with a great family and that doesn't come around very often."

His hobbies outside of wrestling include fishing, swimming, corn hole, spike ball and golf. The senior will wrestle at Bucknell University next season for the Bisons at 197 lbs. and major in finance. He says he likes the stock market side of finance.

### ***The top three finishers were:***

Bechtold - 36 pins out of 40 bouts = 90%

**Rune Lawrence (Sr., Frazier HS)** - 29 pins for 33 bouts = 88%

\*Lawrence won the award last year (4x state champ)

**Sean Kinney (Sr., Nazareth HS)** - 32 pins for 38 bouts = 84% (3x state champ)

The award is named after legendary wrestler **Wade Schalles** who pinned 21 out of 22 wrestlers his senior year at Hollidaysburg High School in 1969. Wade pinned the returning state champion, John Chatman, of Trinity HS in the PIAA State finals. Wade was losing 5-2 at the time and used a double underhook from the down position and elevated Chapman to his back for the dramatic pin. There was pandemonium after he got the pin and the packed crowd in

Rec-Hall at Penn State University gave him a standing ovation! Schalles went on to wrestle for Clarion University where he was a 2x NCAA champion and Outstanding Wrestler in 1972, where he pinned four of his five opponents. In all, "Wonderous" Wade Schalles pinned 106 foes in college.







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## 3A-PIAA Observations

By Bill Creps



### 3A PIAA Observations

\*\*\*Every state championship is valued equally, but not all pathways are equal. In 3A,

Nazareth's Tahir Parkins defeated the state runner up and the 3rd and 5th place medalist. Bethlehem Catholic's Kollin Rath defeated the state runner up as well as the 4th and 5th place winners. There was no champion that defeated four medalists like Frazier's Rune Lawrence did in 2A.

\*\*\* **Total Domination at 285 lbs.** Nazareth's Sean Kinney dominated the heavyweight class. He scored a fall in 54 seconds in the first round, a fall in 2:26 in the quarterfinals, a third fall in the semifinals in

1:00 and a Tech-Fall (15-0) in 4:00. Congratulations to Kinney for his 4 finals appearances and three championships. Best of luck in football in Lafayette

\*\*\* **Never Give up!**

Four grapplers lost their first-round bout and won 5 straight matches to earn the bronze medal. At 107, Council Rock North's Alex Diaz lost to Aiden Herndon who was a state runner-up and rallied to finish third. Manheim Twp.'s Kaedyn Williams lost by a defensive fall and then rallied to win five in a row to finish his career with a bronze medal. At 139 Hempfield's Seamus Mack won five straight to finish 3rd. Also 189 pounder, Tucker Teats of Selinsgrove finished 3rd by winning 5 straight.

\*\*\***The First Ever! ---**

Ridley's Curtis Nelson was his school's first state finalist. Nelson was a regional third in the SE region. He is a junior

and will be wanting to be his school's first state champion.

\*\*\*At 107 lbs., Hatboro-Horsham's Dominick Morrison was his school's first state champion since 1975 when Dennis Merriam won his title.

\*\*\* At the alter three times, but never got the crown. Central Dauphin's Ryan Garvin finished an excellent career but finished as a runners-up 3 -times.

\*\*\***Brother Act --**

Montgomery had the Harer brothers, Owen J. Robert's had the Bechtold brothers. They both made the state finals. Dillon won the 215-pound weight class while his brother Dean finished second at 285. They combined for an 83-4 record for the season.

Until the 2024-2025 season.



Award to Wrestling) with Steve 'Turbo' Toboz (Medal of Courage)



Above right: Long time outstanding wrestling official Fred Richardson and former outstanding Clarion University Coach Bob Bubb.

Left Photo: Bobby Ferraro, Jr. (Lifetime Service

These photos all took place at the 2024 PA Chapter of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame Banquet in Harrisburg courtesy of PWN writer Tom Elling.



## District 6 Report

By John Hartsock



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com**

Jax Forrest had an outstanding sophomore wrestling season for Bishop McCort High School of Johnstown.

After winning the PIAA Class 2A 127-pound championship at Hershey's Giant Center in March, Forrest qualified for the Olympic Trials in freestyle competition at 57 kilograms (126.6 pounds) April 19-20 at Penn State University's Bryce Jordan Center.

Seeded 10th in his weight class among national standouts, Forrest finished the tournament with a 4-2 record and placed fourth at his weight class.

Forrest earned his spot in the Olympic Trials – and a chance to participate as a member of the U.S.A. team in this summer's Olympic Games in Paris, France – by logging a 10-0 victory over Nathan Tomasello in the 57kg finals at the Last Chance Olympic Team Trials qualifier during the first weekend of April in Fairfax, Va.

Forrest's Bishop McCort teammate, current sophomore Bo Bassett – who was a PIAA champion himself at 143 pounds this past March – came within one victory of qualifying for the Olympic Trials in freestyle competition at 65kg (143 pounds) before dropping a 10-0 decision to former four-time Princeton University NCAA All-American Matthew Kolodzik of the New York Athletic Club in the finals of the Last Chance Olympic Team Trials qualifier.

Also competing at the Last Chance Olympic Team Trials qualifier were graduating senior standouts Mason Gibson of Bishop McCort in the 57kg division and Pierson Manville of State College in the 65kg division.

Bo Bassett, his younger brother, Keegan, and Miller all won gold medals at the U.S. Open freestyle tournament held April 24-28 in Las Vegas, Nev.

Keegan Bassett won a gold medal in the U15 age division in both Greco Roman and freestyle competition at 41 kg (roughly 90 pounds), while Miller won gold in the U17 71kg freestyle division

(roughly 157 pounds), and Bo Bassett won gold at 65kg (roughly 143 pounds) as a 17-year-old in the U20 age division.

By virtue of their success in Las Vegas, all three McCort wrestlers will be advancing to international competition this summer. Keegan and Bo Bassett will both be competing in the Pan-American competition in July in Lima, Peru. Bo Bassett will also be trying for a spot on the United States team in the World Championships this September in Spain.

Miller will represent the United States World Team in Jordan this summer.

### Gibson Named OW

Graduating Bishop McCort senior Mason Gibson was named the Outstanding Wrestler at the 50th annual Pittsburgh Wrestling Classic, which this year was held on Saturday, March 30 at Peters Township High School in McMurray, Pa.

Seeded 20th nationally in the 133-pound weight class, Gibson carved out a 3-1 championship victory over seventh-ranked Adrian Meza from Valliant College Prep in Phoenix, Ariz.

The U.S.A. All-Stars defeated the Pennsylvania All-Stars, 27-12.

Gibson – a District 6 and Southwest 2A Regional champion this past season who placed fourth at 133 in the PIAA state tournament – had originally committed to continue his wrestling career at Penn State University, where his older brother, Erik, is currently on the Nittany Lions' roster.

However, Mason Gibson rescinded his commitment from Penn State in mid-April and promptly committed to another NCAA Division I college program, Rutgers University.

### College Commits

Pennsylvania is one of the top high school wrestling states in the country, and annually, many outstanding high school senior wrestlers graduate and prepare to continue their wrestling careers on the NCAA Division I level.

This year is no different, as nine graduating seniors from District 6 are moving on to Division I competition. Along with McCort's Gibson (Rutgers), Huntingdon's Class 2A 189-pound state champion Andrew McMonagle will compete at North Dakota State University and Central Mountain's Class 3A 145-pound state champion Luke Simcox will wrestle at the University of

North Carolina. Other Division I commits from District 6 include State College's Manville (Arizona State University) and Nick Pavlechko (University of Indiana), Bald Eagle Area's Lucas Fye and Central Mountain's Griffin Walizer (both of whom will compete at Lock Haven University), Tyrone's Braden Ewing (Brown University), and West Branch's Landon Bainey (Edinboro University).

### Returning Medalists

Several wrestlers from District 6 who shined in this past season's PIAA state tournament will be returning next year for another go at the gold.

In Class 3A, current State College junior Asher Cunningham, a Penn State commit who won the 160-pound title this past season, and Central Mountain junior Dalton Perry, a Penn State commit and 139-pound runner-up, will return, as will Altoona junior and Princeton University commit Luke Sipes, who placed fourth this past season at 152 pounds. Sipes won the 165-pound championship at the USAW Portuese Northeast Regional in Atlantic City, N.J. earlier this month by defeating Austin Craft of New Jersey, 10-0 in the title match.

In Class 2A, Forrest and Bo Bassett, along with 152-pound state champion Melvin Miller, are all returning for Bishop McCort. Miller won state gold as a freshman this past year.

Two McCort wrestlers who placed third this year – Lincoln Sledzianowski (121 pounds) and Devin Magro (160) – will return, as will third-place finisher Caleb Close (189) of Bald Eagle Area. Close and Magro are current juniors, while Sledzianowski is a current sophomore.

Fifth-placers this year who will return next season are current Bald Eagle Area freshman Tanner Guenot (107 pounds) and current United junior Gideon Bracken (127).

Seventh-placers Caden Judice of Bald Eagle Area (114) and eighth-placers Jackson Butler (145) of Bishop McCort, along with Tyrone's Kyle Scott (172) will also return. Scott is currently a junior, while Judice and Butler are both currently sophomores.

*(John Hartsock has covered high school wrestling and other sports for the Altoona Mirror for over 40 years)*





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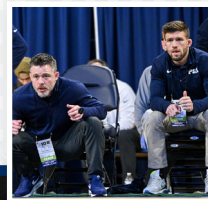
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## The Marty Rusnak Story

By John Hartsock



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During his 36 years as the head wrestling coach at Altoona Area High School, Marty Rusnak's

contributions to the sport on a local, state and even national level were monumental.

But perhaps even more importantly, Rusnak's contributions to the growth and personal development of the legion of wrestlers that he coached was even more profound.

Rusnak passed away on Saturday, April 20 at UPMC Altoona after suffering injuries in a fall at his home several weeks ago. He was 81.

Former wrestlers and coaching colleagues of Rusnak – who was recognized by the National Wrestling Hall of Fame, and also earned induction into the Pennsylvania Wrestling Coaches Hall of Fame and

the District 6 Wrestling Hall of Fame – remembered Rusnak with great fondness and reverence when reached by the Mirror.

"I have so many memories of Marty," said Doug Rosenberry, who was a PIAA Class 3A state medalist as an Altoona Area High School heavyweight back in 1987, and, after graduating from Harvard University, has gone on to become an English teacher at Altoona High School. "He was always doing whatever he could to advance the sport of wrestling, and he was like a father figure to the wrestlers that he coached.

"He influenced my decision to get into teaching and coaching," added Rosenberry, who also served a tenure as an assistant coach under Rusnak and still serves as the public address announcer and sings the national anthem for wrestling events at Altoona.

Rusnak, who compiled 317 dual meet wins at Altoona in a coaching tenure that spanned from the mid-1960s until 2001, coached 44 District 6, 16 regional, and two PIAA state champions. One of the state

champions was heavyweight Brad Benson (1973), a football star who went on to play collegiately at Penn State before becoming a Pro Bowl tackle during a long and successful career with the National Football League's New York Giants.

The other PIAA state champion was Altoona's last -- Steve Maurey, who won the 112-pound title in 1974. Rusnak also coached all three of his sons -- PIAA state tournament qualifiers Marty "Racer" Rusnak and J.J. Rusnak, along with youngest son Mark

– in wrestling at Altoona, as well as future Blair County Sports Hall of Famers Johnny Orr and Jason Kutz, who were both PIAA medalists and NCAA standouts.

As fine a coach as Rusnak was, and as much energy as he put into the sport of wrestling, it was the personal impact that he had on the wrestlers under his direction, and his coaching colleagues, that made the most impact.

"Racer Rusnak and I graduated the same year from Altoona (1988), and I sent a text message to Racer when I heard of Marty's passing, thanking him for sharing his father with so many wrestlers and so many people," said Rosenberry, struggling to maintain his composure. "The years that I spent as an assistant coach with Marty helped me to solidify my already high opinion of him, because it enabled me to see him from an even different perspective and to realize again how much he cared."

Rosenberry said that Rusnak and his late wife, Mary Ann, who passed away in 2013, always made room in their hearts and in their home for wrestlers who were disadvantaged or who were having a particularly difficult time.

Going the extra mile on and off the wrestling mat for people in his life was something that Rusnak did consistently.

"He was involved in our lives even outside of wrestling," Rosenberry said. "During my high school days, I was in a school musical and Marty and Mary Ann attended even though Marty said that he had never previously been to a musical event.

"So that was a big step for him – he cared about his wrestlers beyond what they did on the mat, and he even admitted to me after the musical was over that he kind of enjoyed it," Rosenberry added with a chuckle.

As a coach, Rusnak – a Philipsburg-Osceola High School and Slippery Rock University graduate who taught physical education at Altoona -- was an intense competitor who carried that similar type of authentic emotion into all of his personal dealings.



## Caterpillar to Butterfly

### *The Metamorphosis of Modern Wrestling*

by: Chris Lembeck, special to PWN



The world's oldest and greatest sport is in the midst of deep foundational change—change bound to affect every coach, wrestler and parent in the United States. This article details what that change looks like and, should you choose, how to adapt it to your own training program.

#### **Mind Training**

Today's pioneering coaches train minds as well as bodies. Specifically, they have found the key to the subconscious mind that makes winning inevitable. The particulars of their techniques are for them to tell, but as a coaching consultant and close observer I will lay out three principles they share so that readers may see how accessible they are and how easily adaptable—and transformative—they can be to traditional programs.

#### **The Subconscious Mind**

The simple act of tying your shoe was not always simple. At first you labored over every loop and link. With time and repetition, however, tying your shoes joined walking and talking as automatic behaviors stored in your subconscious mind. In fact, 90 percent of our learned behaviors, attitudes and feelings live in, and go out from our subconscious mind. The subconscious is the automatic pilot that steers us through much of the day.

#### **Tapping the Subconscious Mind**

What if there were a way to implant the experience of winning directly onto your subconscious so that winning became as automatic as tying a shoe? There is indeed a path, and the wrestling

game changers have found it. These coaches train their wrestlers to 1) rouse their imaginations, 2) feed visualizations to their subconscious mind and 3) embody gratitude. Consider each.

#### **Imagination**

Cutting-edge wrestling coaches understand that the strength of the imagination is more important to success than the strength of biceps, back, hips, shoulders and legs combined.

The imagination paints the scene and imprints it on the subconscious mind, which takes everything literally.

Top psychologists and athletes of all kinds believe the subconscious mind to be the greatest sports evolution tool in the world. If your subconscious mind believes you will be the champion, then you will be the champion. Here's how it works.

#### **Visualization, repetition and emotion**

If you want it to achieve something, you need only plant the ending in your subconscious and rehearse it over and over. Caution: in order for this to work you must also infuse the scene with all its inherent emotion. Feel the feelings of 1) leaping into the coach's arms for a triumphant hug, 2) smiling and flexing to the home crowd or 3) stretching that singlet with your thumbs!

About five days before your big match start playing the reel of you performing one of those three victory rites. Do this twice a day for about two minutes—feeling all of the attendant emotion. Ideal times: when you are completely at rest—such as waking up or just before sleep, or at any other moment of deep relaxation.

That's it. Of course, try to fill in as many of the details as possible—the sound of the crowd, the smell of popcorn, your coaches in the corner wearing their favorite team shirts, your opponent intent and determined. Just play the end of the scene. Rehearse only the post-match celebration. After you win the match in real time, without thinking you will perform the celebratory act you had imagined.

This technique, deceptively simple, may not seem all that powerful in the reading, but you will never know the potent partnership of the imagination and subconscious mind unless you try it for yourself.

#### **How It Goes**

When you get into a sticky situation in a match, the subconscious mind will pull strings in your favor. The subconscious believes everything the conscious mind tells it, so when you get to a situation that could go either

way, the subconscious will remember you teaching it through imagination that you have already won the match. The subcon reaches down and gives you the nudge you need to win that scramble, and consequently, the match. Magical! Follow the rules and watch your subconscious take over.

#### **Gratitude**

How do elite wrestlers use gratitude to win matches?

Your subconscious mind speaks the language of emotion, and the most powerful emotion of all is gratitude. Giving thanks before you actually win the State, NCAA, or Olympic title you're after convinces the subconscious that you have already won. If you do just that, according to science, the likelihood of your winning goes up dramatically.

While in the state of gratitude, your body automatically vibrates at that exact speed, putting you in the ultimate state of receiving. Receiving what? Whatever outcome you have been imprinting on the subconscious over and over—for example, the upcoming victory you've been imprinting every morning and night for the last week. It's that simple.

#### **A Final Word**

The power of the subconscious mind, properly understood and channeled, creates an unbeatable edge that more and more coaches are clamoring for. I have laid out some of the hallmarks of mind training for wrestlers from youth to Olympics. They are primed to propel you and your wrestlers to new heights in the world's oldest and greatest sport.

*Chris is a member of the Minnesota Wrestling Hall of Fame, former World Silver Medalist, NCAA All-American and team captain for University of Northern Iowa.*

*He currently lives in Cedar Rapids, IA working as a wrestling writer and consultant for coaches, parents and athletes across the country.*



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National Wrestling Media Association Publication of the Year 2009

## Preakness, the second stop of the Triple Crown

The 149th running of Preakness Stakes, the second stop of the Triple Crown horse racing, took place on Saturday, May 18 at Pimlico Race Track in Baltimore, Maryland and gave wrestling a boost in the arm.

First off, former NFL linebacker Ray Lewis, did the opening introductions and performed his signature football Ravens Dance. Lewis, who was a 3x Florida place winner in wrestling and state champion his senior year, was the MVP of Super Bowl XXXV in 2001 for the Baltimore Ravens, where he played for 17 seasons.

Next up, as the announcers introduced the horses, jockeys and trainers, they mentioned that one of the horses, "Uncle Heavy" was trained by two former wrestlers from New Jersey who both wrestled at the University of Maryland. Mark Reid was an ACC heavyweight champion for the Terrapins in 1972. His nephew and nieces called him Uncle Heavy, which is how the horse got its name.

NBC network showed Mark in his wrestling singlet while wrestling for Maryland. His brother Butch, is the assistant trainer.



**Above:** All wrestlers who wrestled for Coach Rusnak except Jim & Ryan Miller, who wrestled for Central Mtn.

**1st row:** Jim Miller, Dave Patterson, Rodger Seemiller, Joe Orr, Todd Benson.

**2nd row:** Brett Hayford, Sean Benson, Ryan Miller, Troy Benson.

## RUSNAK STORY CONTINUED

*continued from page 11*

"I have never heard anybody say anything bad about Marty Rusnak – he was an outstanding human being," said Joel Gilbert, who has served as Altoona's head wrestling coach since 2008 after previously spending two years as an assistant coach for Rusnak. "All of his wrestlers loved him. He would do anything to help you, and he was a straight shooter who often wore his heart on his sleeve.

"I know that he was heartbroken when his wife passed away, and they're enjoying a reunion up there now," Gilbert added. "But this is a great loss for our entire wrestling program, and indeed, for our entire community."

Other former wrestlers under Rusnak's direction also had high praise for their old coach.

"Marty was a nice guy and a very good coach who coached me to the state championship," said Maurey, who still lives in Altoona. "He knew the techniques of the sport of wrestling very well, and he was a good person who remained a friend of mine even after I graduated from high school."

Another member of the Pennsylvania

Wrestling Coaches Association Hall of Fame, former long-time Philipsburg-Osceola High School coach Dave Caslow, remembered Rusnak's devotion and passion for the sport of wrestling.

"Marty loved the sport and he coached for a long time," Caslow said. "He poured himself into it, and he definitely left his mark – not only on the sport of wrestling, but also on the lives of the wrestlers that he coached. He was not just in the sport to win wrestling matches. He was also there to improve people's lives – and I have great respect for that."

Kutz, who is now living in Colorado Springs, Colo., was a two-time PIAA state medalist for Altoona in the early 1990s and became an Eastern Wrestling League champion at Lehigh University. Kutz went on to place second, third and fifth in the U.S. World Team Trials freestyle competition, sixth at the Olympic Team Trials in freestyle, and won a gold medal at the World Military Freestyle Championships.

Kutz also pointed out that Rusnak – who was honored with a lifetime achievement award by the National Wrestling Hall of Fame in 2015 for his contributions to the sport of wrestling

-- had a great influence on him both personally and athletically.

"I think that he definitely developed personal relationships and truly cared about all the athletes that he coached," Kutz said. "He was dedicated to the sport – I remember rolling out a mat in his front yard, so that I could get some training in.

"And he and his wife would have the wrestlers over to their house and feed us before we left for the state tournament," added Kutz, who also pointed out that when he was involved in offseason freestyle competition as a high school wrestler, Rusnak brought in former Penn State great Troy Sunderland to conduct clinics at Altoona for the wrestlers. "(Rusnak's passing) is a bummer for all of us, but I know that the loss of his wife was extremely devastating for him, and it is a blessing for him to be back with her now."

*(John Hartsock has covered high school wrestling and other sports for the Altoona Mirror for over 40 years)*



**Left: The Rick Mahonski Most Dominant Boy's Wrestler Rune Lawrence of Frazier High School with his Coach Buck Watkins at the HOF Banquet.**

Lawrence became the 14th PA Wrestler to win 4 State titles. He went 33-1 this season with 29 pins, including 21 in the first period. He finishes his HS career with a 145-8 mark, 102 pins and 9 tech falls.

*photo courtesy of Tom Elling*



## Half Nelson Report

### *By don't panic with Coach Joe*



**Baranik, Owner/  
Founder**

**Four-Peat:** Penn State will try to 4-peat next season for the third time. I guess you would call that a quad-trifecta. The Lions have won NCAA titles in (2011,'12'13'14),

(2016,'17'18'19), (2022,'23,'24). So, Coach Cael and company have won 11 titles in 14 years of the NCAA tournament (no tournament in 2020 because of the China virus), and placed second once!

### **Take the PWN Challenge:**

Ask the good neighbor on your right, the good neighbor on your left and the neighbor down the street if they know who Nick Saban, Olivia Dunne and Caitlin Clark are? Most will tell you Saban is a highly successful football coach for Alabama who won 7 national championships and just recently retired. A majority of folks will tell you Dunne of LSU is one of the best female gymnasts in the U.S. Then, of course, Clark of Iowa, who set the women's NCAA basketball scoring record. After those three questions, ask them who Cael Sanderson, Aaron Brooks and Carter Starocci are? My guess is that most will know the first three questions, and very few will know the second questions, unless they live in, or near Happy Valley.

**Why is this?** One reason is the lack of marketing of course. Another reason may be that we need agents for wrestling where their sole purpose is to get exposure for that particular coach or athlete. Thank goodness for ESPN and the Big Ten, ACC, PAC 12 and other conference Networks. Without their coverage, it would be a lot worse. The more awareness we can get for wrestling, the more colleges will be willing and wanting to add men and women's wrestling instead of wrestling begging schools to include it in their athletic department.

The sport of wrestling has proven it can draw crowds, as eight colleges have attracted 14K+ fans at Penn State, Iowa, Minnesota, Oklahoma State, Ohio State, Iowa State and Princeton. Lehigh has had 10K and Arizona State, Oklahoma, Pitt, Rutgers, Michigan and Oregon State have produced 8K+. NC State, who sold out three home duals this past season with over 5,000 fans, is joined by VT, Missouri, and Nebraska with over 5K in attendance. When I was the assistant at the USMA at

West Point, I helped produce the largest crowd (4,300) to ever see a dual at Army. You must remember, most of those fans showed up because they heard about the event from other wrestling fans. Our sport gets very little national publicity in the way of promotion.

My point is, wrestling has proven itself as a viable sport and it may be the 3rd biggest collegiate sport behind football and men's basketball. Now, we have to get other programs to get on board to attract spectators. When wrestling generates big crowds, everybody wins!

Wrestling is important because it was the first sport, one of the first five Olympic sports, the only fair sport (wt. classes), the toughest sport, the sport that requires the most conditioning, and the only sport that is a natural for humans and animals!

**No to Greco:** In my opinion, it is ridiculous that we only have six Freestyle weight classes. Team USA is leaving a lot of talent at home. Personally, I think we should take the six Greco weights and make them all Freestyle. Case in point; they have 10 Freestyle wt. classes in the World Championships. You can see on TV that the fans aren't flocking to watch Greco. I like throws as much as the next person, but you can throw in Freestyle as well. It almost looks like a pushing game or a modified version of sumo wrestling. I don't think too many wrestling fans, myself included, can name two wrestlers on our USA Greco Team, yet most fans can list most of our USA Freestyle and women's teams. I say keep it simply – folk style Wrestling and Olympic Wrestling.

### **Excitement Since Our Last Issue:**

So much breaking news has happened over the last month. First, there was the changing of the guard at the Olympic Trials held at Penn State. Former PSU wrestler Jason Nolf upset veteran Jordan Burroughs in two straight bouts. Burroughs is a former Olympic champion and owns six World titles and a silver. Nolf then fell in two straight bouts to fellow Nittany Lion Wrestling Club member and Cornell 4x NCAA champion, Kyle Dake. The other big upset was by newly minted 4x NCAA champion Aaron Brooks of Penn State, who defeated the "Face of Penn State Wrestling," David Taylor, in two straight bouts. Taylor won Olympic Gold in the last Olympics and has also won three World titles and a silver.

### **Smith of OSU Retires**

Second, one of the top 5 best American wrestlers and one of our all-time great

coaches has retired in **John Smith** at Oklahoma State. Smith was a 2x NCAA champion for Oklahoma St. who went on to win Olympic Gold twice (only 3 Americans have done so in wrestling) and four World titles. He was replaced by **David Taylor** who was a 2x NCAA champion and 4x finalist for Penn State and finished his career with the Lions 134-3 (121 bonus point wins)! Taylor also won Olympic Gold and three World titles and a silver. He finished his high school career at 180-2 and his world competition record was 152-21.

Taylor took his brother-in-law, **Jimmy Kennedy**, who was an assistant coach at PSU, and made him the head assistant on his staff and hired **Thomas Gilman**, who trains with the Nittany Lion Wrestling Club, as an assistant for OSU. Kennedy did his collegiate wrestling at Illinois and Gilman wrestled at Iowa. Do yourself a favor and watch the press conference of Taylor being introduced to the OSU Cowboy family. He did an excellent 35 to 40 minute speech. He mentions in his speech about the time he wrestled his wife Kendra when they were 8 or 10 years old at a tournament in Oklahoma, and the recruiting trip he took to Oklahoma State coming out of St. Paris Graham, under legendary coach Jeff Jordan.

**Third, it was recently announced that Carter Starocci and Greg Kerkvliet will both return for their final season of eligibility.** Starocci will attempt to become the first 5x NCAA champion (he gained an extra year from Covid), and Kerkvliet will try to win his second NCAA title. That means, the Lions will return their whole starting lineup from last year except Bernie Truax (placed 5th) and Brooks.

Until December, enjoy the Olympics in Paris, France this summer and with two native Pennsylvanians on the team in Spencer Lee (Franklin Regional) Iowa, and Zain Retherford (Benton) Penn State, it will be fun. Both were 3x NCAA champions. Tell a friend about PWN and please send feedback to: [pwn.baranik@gmail.com](mailto:pwn.baranik@gmail.com)

PWN comes out 6x per year December-May.

He has coached wrestling on every level and still coaches today.

**Joe Baranik is the Founder/  
Owner of the Pennsylvania  
Wrestling Newsmagazine.**



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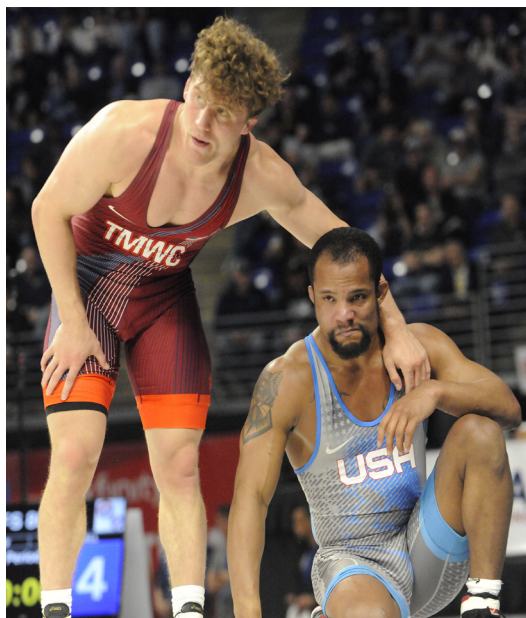
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## MAY TAKEDOWN TRIVIA

### compiled by Joe Baranik

- Seen on a wrestling T-shirt: Wrestling Definition; “The art of folding clothes with people still in them.”
- Former Nittany Lion 4x All-American and 2x NCAA champion **Nick Lee** will join the coaching staff at Penn State. Lee who lost in the Olympic Trial finals to **Zain Retherford** will take Jimmy Kennedy’s place, who went to Oklahoma State to join David Taylor’s staff.
- **David Taylor** also added former Lion NCAA qualifier and teammate **Bryan Pearsall** to his staff at Oklahoma State as a recruiting coordinator. Pearsall spent the past seven years at the University of Penn as the associate Head Coach.
- **Mark Hall**, pictured kneeling below, who spent the last three years at Penn in charge of their Regional Training Center has been added to the University of Oklahoma staff as Director of Operations. The Sooners are led by **Roger Kish**, who is starting his second year at the helm. Hall was a 3x Big 10 champion and freshman NCAA champion for Penn State in 2017, as well as a 2x NCAA runner-up.
- Former Edinboro wrestler and 1996 Olympian **Lou Rosselli** will become an assistant at Pitt. Rosselli was the head coach at the University of Oklahoma for 7 years and on the staff at Ohio State for 10 years as part of their National Championship team in 2015. He also was an assistant coach under 4x Olympic medalist **Bruce Baumgartner** at Edinboro for 11 years.
- So to recap, eight wrestlers with ties to Penn State have earned coaching jobs in the last month. Taylor, a 4x NCAA finalist and 2x champion, a 3x World champ and an Olympic Gold Medalist, became the head coach at Oklahoma St. along with Kennedy, a former assistant at PSU and Thomas Gilman, who trained with Nittany Lion Wrestling Club. Finally, Vincenzo Joseph, a 3x NCAA finalist and 2x champion has been hired on the staff at the University of North Carolina. Their head coach, Rob Koll, is a PIAA State Champ from State College, and his father was the Head Coach at Penn State for 13 years. You talk about spreading the wealth across the country!
- Mitchell Mesenbrink (165) of Penn State was named AWW Rookie of the Year. He and Rocco Welsh of Ohio State were the only freshmen to wrestle into the NCAA finals. Mesenbrink is the 4th Lion to be named Rookie of the Year. The other PSU wrestlers awarded were Jeremy Hunter (1997), David Taylor (2011), Jason Nolf (2016) and Levi Haines (2023).
- Wyatt Hendrickson, who placed 3rd the past two years in the NAAs for the U.S. Air Force Academy at (285), has transferred to Oklahoma State for his last year of eligibility. Hendrickson was 97-11 for the Air Force and 79% of his wins were bonus-point wins.
- InterMat reported that 2x NCAA champion (Minnesota) and Olympic Gold Medalist, Gable Steveson, was released from WWE on May 3. It was reported that the reason for his and at least 11 other members of WWE’s developmental NXT Brand was because of their inability to connect with the fans.
- 4x NCAA Champ Carter Starocci, of PSU hinted on social media that Penn State may wrestle an outdoor dual at Beaver Stadium in November. If that happens, it would be a special moment for PSU Wrestling, and the entire wrestling community across the country!
- As reported by Jim Kalin of Amateur Wrestling News, not a single rookie won an individual national title this year. That includes Division I, II, III, or the NAIA.
- Ryan Crookham (Saucon Valley) Lehigh (133), Tyler Kasak (Beth. Catholic) Penn State (149), Mesenbrink, PSU (165), Rocco Welsh (Waynesburg) Ohio State (174), and Nick Feldman (Melvern Prep) Ohio St. (285), all made the Amateur Wrestling News All-Rookie Team.
- Earning the All-Rookie Second Team were: Braeden Davis (125) PSU, Ty Watters (149) (West Allegheny) WVU, Mac Stout (197) (Mt. Lebanon) Pitt, and Dayton Pitzer (285) (Mt. Pleasant) Pittsburgh.
- There were 15 freshmen All-Americans in Div. I this year and six of them were true freshmen. They include: Luke Stanich-Lehigh, Nasir Bailey-Little Rock, Kasak-PSU, Watters-WVU, Meyer Shapiro-Cornell, and Welsh-Ohio State.
- Austin Johnson (Muncy HS) a 3x PIAA State finalist and 2023 state champion, has verbally committed to wrestle at the University of Oklahoma after his senior year in 2025. Johnson has a career record of 111-4 competing between 215 and 285. The #40 recruit, is a Powerade champion (2022) and runner-up.



• Former Wrestlers in the NFL Draft: Zach Frazier, a 4x state champion in WV, Logan Lee, a 2x state champion from Illinois, and Payton Wilson, a state champion from NC, were all drafted by the Pittsburgh Steelers last month... **story on pg 27** Former Michigan RB Blake Corum was the 83rd overall pick for the Los Angeles Rams. He was the Big 10 Medal of Honor recipient, and Offensive MVP in the National Championship Game. Corum placed 4th in the state tournament in Maryland as a sophomore for St. Vincent Pallotti.

• Look for #55, Mason Graham of the U. of Michigan in the Fall. As a junior nose guard and former standout wrestler, he should dominate. He was named defensive MVP vs. Alabama in the semi-finals of the College Football Playoff in the Rose Bowl

• 2x NCAA finalist and 5x All-American Trent Hiday (Lewistown) NC State, pictured left consoling Mark Hall, was named ACC Scholar Athlete of the Year. This was the second time he has won the award. He also was named in 2022.

*Olympic Trials Photos are courtesy of Tom Elling*

## The Retirement of a Wrestling Legend

**John Smith**, a 2x Olympic Gold medalist and 4x World champion who ran the Cowboy program for 33 years, has retired. Smith was a 3x NCAA finalist and 2x NCAA champion.

When Smith lost in the 1985 national finals to future House of Representative Jim Jordan, he won his next 90 consecutive bouts. John coached 5 NCAA team titles, 33 NCAA individual champions and 152 All-Americans at Oklahoma State University. He is the winningest coach in school history with 490 victories and only 73 losses with 6 ties. Coach Smith's teams finished in the top 5 at the NCAAs 21 times.

Coleman Scott, a 3x PIAA state champion for Waynesburg HS won a national title for Smith and won the Bronze medal in the 2012 London Olympics.

Smith is third all-time in Div. I wins behind Harold Nichols (Iowa State) and Dale Thomas (Oregon State). Coach Nichols, interestingly enough, started the wrestling program at

Arkansas State in 1949, where he stayed for five years and produced a record of 37-18-3. He then went to Iowa State and built a dynasty behind his famed pupil Dan Gable. Coach Nichols career coaching wins equal 520-112-17.

Smith's signature move was the low single. Back when he wrestled, Olympic scoring only awarded one point for a takedown. If they gave two for a takedown when John wrestled, he may have went for a 3rd Olympic run!

Sports Illustrated did a six page feature story on Smith titled "How low can you go," writing about his famous move. John grew up in a wrestling family. His brother Pat Smith was the first 4x NCAA champion, and brother Lee Roy Jr, was an NCAA champion and a 3x silver medalist in World competition. Lee Roy is now the Executive Director of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame. Their nephew, J.T. Realmuto is a catcher for the Philadelphia Phillies. John is adored in Stillwater, OK. When the state of Oklahoma

celebrated their Statehood, John was atop the float that was in the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

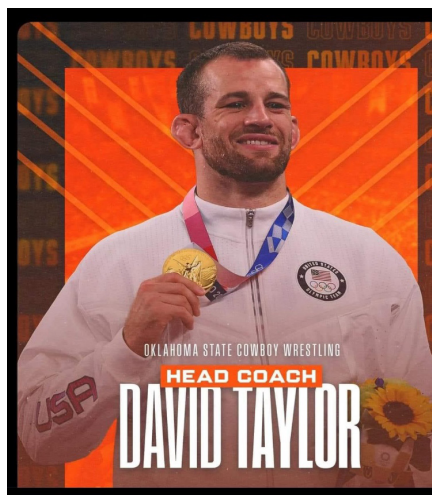


## Taylor Becomes a Cowboy

**David Taylor** is the first Cael Sanderson apprentice to become a head coach. He is Oklahoma State University's 8th head coach in school history, a school that has produced the most NCAA titles with 34!

Taylor was a 4x Big 10 champion, 4x NCAA finalist, 2x NCAA champion and a 2x Dan Hodge Trophy winner. The "Magic Man" went 134-3 while a Nittany Lion with all but 13 of those victories, bonus point wins. That included 50 pins and 42 tech falls. He was on 4 straight Penn State NCAA Championship teams (2011-2014).

Taylor succeeds 2x Olympic Gold medalist and 4x World champion John Smith who ran the Cowboy program for 33 years.





## Lasure Wins First Schalles PA Pinner Award for Girls

by Joe Baranik

**Violette Lasure of Chestnut Ridge becomes the first girl to win the Schalles PA Pinner Award** Presented by PWN and sponsored by the Pittsburgh Trophy Company.

Lasure (33-0), only a freshman, pinned 31 foes out of 32 bouts for a 97% pin percentage! She becomes Ridge's first ever girls State Champion, and she did it without a loss. Morgan Edwards of Blair Academy is the only one she didn't pin.

"It feels great accomplishing my goal of becoming the first-ever girls 142 lb. PA State champion" She told PWN women's columnist Deborah Lynch. "I'm hoping my win

inspires young girls to come out for the sport to continue the growth."

Violette has been wrestling for five years, mostly with the boys. She is very quiet, so her coaches jokingly call her "Silent Assassin." She said she pins most of her opponents from the top position by using the "bundle" where you take the opposite wrist and rap their own arm around their head and collect both elbows for the fall. Her Coach, Josh Deputy, coaches the boys and girls team at Chestnut Ridge.

Lasure is an honor student and a member of the FAA, and she likes to fly fish for bass and trout.

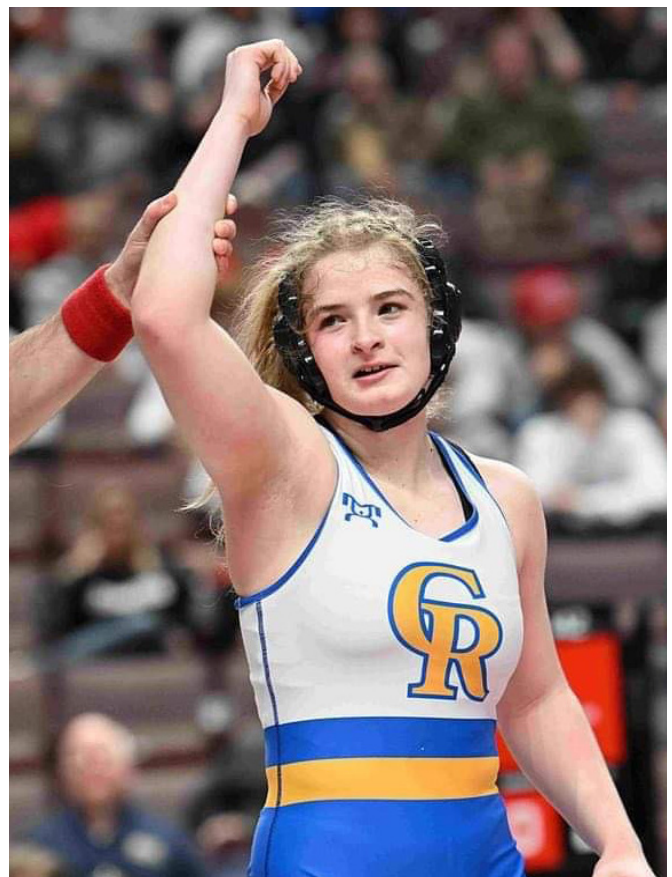
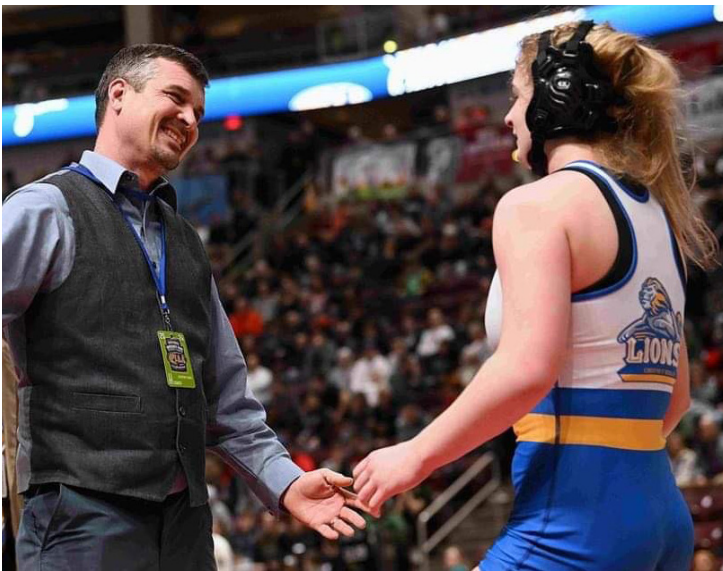
Violette comes from a family of wrestlers. Her mom, Bethany Alt, is a coach for PA USA Wrestling, while her sister Juliet Alt is a rising 9th grader who won the PA Junior Wrestling and Keystone State titles. Her brother Benton Alt, a 5th grader, won a PA Junior Wrestling State Championship.

### Top 3 Schalles PA Pinner for Girl Wrestlers

**Violette Lasure, Chestnut Ridge:** 31 pins for 32 bouts (97%)

**Jael Miller, Punxsutawney** 26 pins for 27 bouts (96%)

**Aubree Krazer, Easton** 22 pins for 23 bouts (95.6%)



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## More Takedown Trivia from FloWrestling

### \*Trivia from the NCAA's- Compliments of Andrew Spey and Andy Hamilton of FLO- WRESTLING...SUBSCRIBE to flowrestling.com

- There were at least 10 All-Americans from Pennsylvania for the sixth tournament in a row. The Keystone State was the only state that produced double-digit AAs.
- Pennsylvania leads the nation with 768 Division I All-Americans. Oklahoma is second with 565.
- Four wrestlers came back to capture NCAA titles this year after suffering a loss at their conference tournament — Cornell's Vito Arujau (133), Virginia Tech's Caleb Henson (149), Iowa State's David Carr (165) and Penn State's Carter Starocci (174)
- PSU Coach Cael Sanderson coached four champs and eight All-Americans, running his Penn State totals to 38 champs and 86 All-Americans at 14 NCAA Championships.
- Penn State collected 97 takedowns in

Kansas City and allowed only 19.

- Starocci became the eighth wrestler seeded outside the top eight to win a title since 1979 (*\*only due to his medical forfeits at the Big Tens; had been unbeaten before that*)
- Cornell became the first team since 1962 to finish second in the team race with three All-Americans.
- South Dakota State set a school record with four All-Americans.
- Hartland, Wisconsin produced the most points at the NCAA Championships this year with 40.5 — Missouri's Keegan O'Toole scored 21 and Penn State's Mitchell Mesenbrink added 19.5. Hartland Arrowhead High School produced three of the 33 wrestlers in the 165-pound bracket — O'Toole, Mesenbrink and Bucknell's Noah Mulvaney.
- Daton Fix (133) Oklahoma State, is the tournament's first four-time runner-up.
- There were nine sets of brothers in this year's national tournament.

- Parker Keckeisen (184) Northern Iowa, became the first undefeated D1 champ for the Panthers since Bill Dotson in 1963.
- With Ryan Crookham and fellow freshman Luke Stanich, who placed fifth at 125, Lehigh became one of four programs with multiple freshmen All-Americans. Penn State (Tyler Kasak and Mitchell Mesenbrink), Ohio State (Rocco Welsh and Nick Feldman) and AR-Little Rock (Nasir Bailey and Stephen Little) were the other three programs with two freshmen AAs.
- Kelvin Griffin of Lehigh was the first national qualifier from the state of Maine.
- Alabama had three qualifiers for the first time in history (probably). Sam Latona, Isaiah Powe and Will Miller all won a match at the 2024 NCAAAs and all have at least one more year of eligibility. Alabama on the rise!



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page 13



## Notes from the Olympic Trials in State College PA

**\*compiled by Joe Baranik**

- Two native Pennsylvanians, **Spencer Lee** (57kg) (Franklin Regional) who was a 3x NCAA champion at Iowa, and **Zain Retherford** (65 kg) (Benton), who was a 3x NCAA champion for Penn State, have made the Olympic team. Lee & Retherford are both 2x Hodge Trophy winners. The Zain Train also won World title last year.
- In the featured bout in the Olympic Trials at the Bryce Jordan Center at Penn State, 4x NCAA champion **Aaron Brooks** defeated Olympic Gold medalist **David Taylor** 4-1 and 3-1. The two time Hodge Trophy winners put on a show, but Brooks was sharper as he won two straight bouts against the former 4x NCAA finalist “Magic Man”. Brooks, who became the 7th person to win 4 NCAA titles and the Hodge Trophy last month, is the first American to beat Taylor since 2017!
- Penn State had 16 current, former or future wrestlers entered in the Olympic Trials. Soon the area will be called “Wrestling Valley” in place of Happy Valley!
- One of the most decorated wrestlers in US history, **Jordan Burroughs**, lost 3-0 to **Jason Nolf**, a former 3x NCAA champion for Penn State and a PA native (Yardly, PA). ***Nolf beat him in the challenge bracket final at 74kg with a blast double leg takedown, pictured below right.*** As reported by Fox News Sports, as Burroughs was walking back to the locker room, a fan yelled out “career is over.” Jordan yelled back “Hey, what have you done?” His college coach Mark Manning, who was his corner coach, shouted back to the fan “Classless.” Burroughs won six World titles and Olympic Gold in the 2012 London Games. **Burroughs** started international competition in 2011 and won 69 straight bouts before he lost in 2014. The 69 straight wins still stands as the longest in American history.
- Kyle Snyder** (97 kg) a 3x NCAA champion for Ohio State has made his 3rd Olympic team and 10th straight U.S. World team. Snyder, who trains with the Nittany Lion Wrestling Club, is only 28 years old. Kyle is the youngest American wrestler to win a World Championship at age 19 in 2015, and he won Olympic Gold in 2016 to become the youngest to do so. He is just the 11th wrestler to make three Olympic teams, and only the second to make 3 before the age of 30, joining **Mark Fuller**, a Greco-Roman wrestler who wrestled in 4 straight-1980-’84, ’88, and ’92. Fuller is one of just two Americans who have wrestled in four Olympiads, joining **Bruce Baumgartner**.
- Baumgartner has the distinction of being the only American wrestler to medal in four Olympics (Gold in ’84), (Silver ’88), (Gold ’92) and (Bronze ’96). He went on to win a total of 13 World or Olympic medals!
- Only three American Wrestlers have won Gold at two different Olympic Games. George Mehnert (1904-1908), John Smith (1988-1992) Bruce Baumgartner (1984-1992).
- Helen Maroulis**, became the first Women wrestler to win Olympic Gold in 2016, and she now becomes the first U.S. women to make three Olympic Teams! She will also be the oldest female to represent Team USA in wrestling at the age of 32.
- Kyle Dake**, a former 4x NCAA champion at Cornell is a 4x World Champion and will participate in his second Olympics. He earned a Bronze Medal in the 2021 Tokyo Games. The Dan Hodge Trophy winner trains with the Nittany Lion Wrestling Club.
- Amit Elor**, a 2x World Champ, is the youngest female to make the U.S. Olympic Wrestling Team at age 20. She missed the Olympic Trials age limit by one day at the last Trials. She is the youngest American to win a World title at age 18! Her last defeat to a female in the USA was at age 11 in 2015.
- Kennedy Blades** became the first American to unseat 6x World Champion Adeline Gray since 2012! She will become the second-youngest U.S. woman to wrestle at the Olympics after Elor.



**Left:** former Olympic Gold Medalist Jordan Burroughs vs NCAA runner-up Mitchell Mesenbrink at 74 KG: (163 lbs): Burroughs won 8-3 in a hotly contested bout. A lot of head-butting. Burroughs got booed by the partisan fans at BJC.  
*Olympic Trials Photos are courtesy of Tom Elling*



## Before Carter there was Tony.....Starocci that is!



by Mike Haehy,  
Assistant Professor  
Pennwest Edinboro,  
Head Coach of  
Erie Prep

Carter Starocci,  
the 2019  
graduate of

Erie Cathedral Prep, has been a man on a mission since his Jr High days at St. George School in Erie. Being a multiple time Pennsylvania Junior Olympic champion, followed by being a Pennsylvania Jr High State Champion and 2-time PIAA State Champion. After graduation from Prep Carter headed off to Penn State University where he has become Penn State's first 4-time NCAA Champion (Aaron Brooks also became one a few minutes afterwards). But before Carter there were some other Starocci's that made a name for themselves.

Tony Starocci, who was a 1949 graduate of Erie Tech Memorial High School, was a standout wrestler in high school, but he always wanted to be a boxer. However, Erie Tech didn't offer that as a sport, so Tony turned to wrestling. He started the sport in ninth grade, which was his first year at Tech, and did average at best with a .500 record. His second year was much different though. He finished with a 16-2 record losing only to Riddle from Grove City and Steinmetz from Erie Strong Vincent, the Steinmetz match was for the city title too!

His 1948 season was his best season though, as he finished with a 16-1 record and entered the postseason beating some high quality opponents from Greenville, Oil City and Grove City to capture the District X title. From there he advanced on to the PIAA State Tour-

namment, which at that time was held in Kingston, PA in March of 1948. He severely injured his ribs in his semi-finals against Hobart Wagner from Farrell, but still made it to the finals. In the finals he faced Julius Walter from Hollidaysburg where he lost 5-0 with broken ribs. His senior was a shame, as he was told that he was too old to compete and didn't realize until after the season that what he was told wasn't correct, so he never wrestled his senior season.

Mark Starocci, Tony's son, was a standout baseball player at Erie Strong Vincent High School. He graduated from high school in 1973. I had the pleasure of knowing Mark quite well as he was frequently traveling to follow Carter all through his high school career. He was a great person who was fairly quiet but also a very positive influence, and a great role model for Carter. He was always there supporting him along the way.

Chris Starocci, who is Carter's dad, was a standout football player at Erie Strong Vincent High School. Chris was a very-strong, hard-nosed athlete and excelled in football. He was a 2-time all-Metro player and a 2-time all-District player on both offense and defense! He also played in the Save an Eye Game which is a big and long-standing event in Erie. Chris was at every match during Carter's high school career, he was always positive and was a great parent who always supported what happening both off and on the mat at Erie Cathedral Prep. Chis graduated from Strong Vincent in 1996.

Carter also had an older brother, Chris who was a standout football player and wrestler at Erie Strong Vincent. He was first team all-district in football and a district champion in wrestling his senior year at Strong Vincent. Chris was a great young man and could probably beat Carter all the way until Carter was a junior/senior in high school, you know how competitive brothers can be!! Chris graduated in 2014 from Strong Vincent.

Now that brings us to Carter, who as you can see, came from a long line of successful athletes all carrying the Starocci name. Carter has recently decided to return to Penn State to hopefully become the FIRST 5-time NCAA Champion, since he gained an extra year due to the COVID waiver in 2020.

I have been around them all, except Tony, and they are all great people. They are super friendly, positive and supportive of one another. I have been blessed to have known them and I have been blessed to have coached Carter. Great job Starocci family!. You have made everyone from Erie Pennsylvania proud, thank you!





## Ironhead Lines: PSU Wrestling

by: Jeff Byers



There are varying degrees of being “all-in” on something. It is similar to giving maximum effort. You or I may truly believe we are giving maximum effort and then someone comes along and show you how to give a little

more and you realize that there really is more to give.

Being “all-in” on anything doesn’t guarantee success or even the results one may be looking to attain. You can be “all-in” on a diet and still not hit a target weight or be “all-in” on a fundraising goal and not hit the mark. And there are plenty of other examples. But being “all-in” gives you the best chance for success and should at least leave you satisfied that you did all you can do.

In a sport like wrestling, sometimes being “all-in” gets mistaken for being completely obsessed or out-working everyone. While a tremendous commitment is certainly needed and hard work is undoubtedly part of the equation, it is a comprehensive approach and recognizing all the elements that are needed for true success that allows a competitor to have a chance at reaching the highest pinnacles.

However, I can work harder than someone at running let’s say. I could be out there running 20 miles a day uphill to prepare for a 10k race. But that would wear my body out and wouldn’t prepare it for the distance needed in that particular race. Yes, hard work is certainly part of the equation, but being smart about how you work and giving your body a chance to recuperate, to be properly hydrated and nourished, to be in the right mental frame of mind, to be properly rested, these are all among the many components that can lead to optimum performance in the biggest matches.

These are elements for individual success. For an entire program to have success, you have to have wrestlers willing to make that commitment and to focus on all of the different elements that can allow the opportunity for success. But a program needs more.

Certainly you need coaches that committed to helping the wrestlers achieve their goals and to providing all of the necessary tools. So that involves certainly recruiting and really figuring out which guys can have success at the collegiate level but are also willing to make the commitment to your team to make it successful. It obviously involves preparing the guys physically as well. Through training and technique, the

wrestlers in a program should be improving throughout their careers. But it also involves providing the different needs of different wrestlers.

College wrestlers in Division I programs have a lot of demands on their time and many are driven to be successful in all areas of their life. That is a great deal of pressure. So allowing wrestlers the opportunity to get help mentally, academically and keeping tabs on their overall well-being is critically important.

Having the right support staff is a big part of the equation. Having a trainer and medical staff that can properly care for the athlete and tend to the injuries but also understands the demands of the sport and what is necessary for the athlete to compete at the highest level is important. Having good strength coaches who also know how to build the bodies up and prepare wrestlers for the demands of the sport is important. Strength is certainly important in wrestling but so is flexibility, quickness, explosiveness and understanding how all of that fits together is crucial in planning out a training regiment.

There are a ton of other important variables. These days fundraising is crucial. Wrestlers are expecting financial opportunities, they are expecting nice lockerrooms, a wrestling facility that has ample room and equipment to allow for their best development. They are looking for perks - what foods and drinks are available, what additional aids to allow the mind and body to recuperate quickly and strongly are available?

The administrative component is very important. What kind of support is the school giving our sport. Is it a priority? From travel arrangements to facilities, from marketing to compliance, the schools that are “all-in” are going to try to give their student-athletes the best opportunity to succeed both in the classroom and in the sport as well as the community at large.

There are lots of coaches and athletes that are “all-in” but for a program to be “all-in,” it has to extend beyond that. There has to be a strong administration focused on providing the best opportunity, a strong fan base that supports the program through passion but also through financial contributions and there has to be strong support staff.

“Other coaches are out having drinks. Our coaches are doing our laundry,” Carter Starocci said during this year’s NCAA Wrestling Championships.

His point is that the Penn State coaches are truly “all-in.” Their focus is on what they can do, what they can provide, to give the student-athletes under their care the best chance to compete at the highest level.

There are a lot of different ways to measure

the degree of commitment by a particular program. From my vantage point, the three schools that are definitely “all-in” with wrestling are Penn State, Iowa and Oklahoma State. I think those three schools have a true commitment from the administration, the coaches, the support staff, the fans and alumni to give their athletes the chance to succeed at the highest level. All three of those schools by the way, have radio broadcasts of their matches. I’m not saying that is a sole determinant but when the school believes that is necessary and the fans expect it, that is certainly a very strong indicator that a program is “all-in.”

I think there are several other schools that are probably “all-in” or very close to it. The ones that jump to mind right now are Ohio State, Michigan, Iowa State, Arizona State and Cornell. There are probably several other schools that are “all-in” in several areas but need some additional support from either administration or boosters.

Little Rock’s performance this season was certainly worth of attention. In just its fifth season as a Division I program, the team finished 19th at the NCAA tournament, ahead of such notable historical powers as Minnesota and Oklahoma. When Little Rock (AR) added wrestling, it made a real commitment to the sport and in addition to it’s NCAA tournament finish, the Trojans picked up big Pac-12 victories over Arizona State and Oregon State.

South Dakota State, which finished 13th at the NCAA tournament this year, is another program that is making a strong push as an “all-in” program.

For the health of the sport and the excitement for all involved, the hope and the push needs to be to continue to get as many programs as possible to be as close to “all-in” as possible.

The benefits aren’t just for those of us that love wrestling. The character, perseverance and individual responsibility that wrestling demands of its participants means our sport will continue to produce leaders who will make contributions to society far beyond the wrestling mat. I recently did an interview with coach Cael Sanderson for the Nit-tany Lion Wrestling Club’s Rokfin channel and we were talking about the investment financial boosters make and the importance of it. And while the hope is that it will help foster winning for the program, he said and I agree with him, that it’s really an investment in our society and trying to produce the next generation of leaders.

At the end of the day, that is why I hope we truly get more programs going “all-in” on wrestling - the result will be more leaders doing the right thing for our communities in the future.

## PSU's 2024-25 Projected Lineup

### The Race for Second Place is on for the 2025 NCAA Wrestling Championships

*By Joe Baranik*

It was announced on Mother's Day weekend that Penn State heavyweight Greg Kerkvliet will return for his last year of eligibility. What does this mean to the rest of the 77 NCAA Div. I teams? Unless there is an earthquake in Happy Valley or the whole Nittany Lion team comes down with some rare disease, the Lions will win their 13th NCAA title and 4th in a row (12th under Coach Cael) in Philadelphia in 2025.

That means they could have eight All-Americans in the line-up including three returning National Champs (Levi Haines, Carter Starocci, Kerkvliet) and two runner-ups (Beau Bartlett and Mitchell Mesenbrink).

Credit the PSU coaching staff for solid recruiting and good depth. Speaking of recruiting, this year's class should be ranked #1. Here is a projected line-up by most experts:

- 125- Luke Lilledahl-Incoming freshman (Braedan Davis may redshirt)
- 133- Aaron Nagao
- 141- Beau Bartlett
- 149- Shayne Van Ness (Tyler Kasak may redshirt)
- 157- Mitchell Mesenbrink
- 165- Levi Haines \*(may change weights with Mesenbrink)
- 174- Alex Facundo
- 184- Josh Barr (went 14-0 as a redshirt freshman) or Lucas Cochran
- 197- Carter Starocci (going for 5th NCAA title)
- 285- Greg Kerkvliet

*Josh Barr, pictured right, won 4 state titles for Davison HS in Michigan and went 125-1 as an honor student. He also won a Junior National title at Fargo.*



Pictured above right is PSU Heavyweight and 2024 NCAA Champ Greg Kerkvliet while the Lions pose for the NCAA team title.



## Girls have eyes on Fargo

By Deborah Lynch



With no returning Olympic champions repeating on the 2024 U.S. wrestling team for either men or women, a woman might

be the best chance for the U.S. to win wrestling gold this summer in Paris.

Amit Elor, 20, has won eight world titles in different age groups, and is the defending non-Olympic world champion at 72 kg. She moved down to 68 kg for the Olympic Trials, held at Penn State University's Bryce Jordan Center in April. Because she had qualified at that weight at a Pan American qualifier, she got a bye into the best-of-three finals against Forrest Molinari, whom she beat 6-0 and 2-1 to qualify for the Olympic team. She is the youngest U.S. woman to make an Olympic team, but she's not alone as a 20-year-old on the team.

Kennedy Blades of Chicago (76 kg), also 20, will represent the U.S. in Paris. She won her spot by soundly defeating Adeline Gray, the most decorated woman in U.S. wrestling history with nine world medals and an Olympic silver medal. Blades showed technical superiority in 11-6 and 8-3 victories over Gray. Blades is the only woman on the U.S. team without a world medal.

Other women who will represent the U.S. in Paris include Sarah Hildebrandt (50 kg), Dominique Parrish (53 kg), Helen Maroulis (57 kg), and Kayla Miracle (62 kg). Maroulis, 32, was the first American woman ever to win a wrestling gold medal when she won in 2016. She is the first American woman to make three Olympic wrestling teams. To win her third berth, she overcame Jacarra Winchester (who took silver in last year's world championships at 55 kg) by fall in the first match, and 6-0 in the second. Maroulis also won bronze in 2021 and won a world title in 2021.

Hildebrandt defeated 18-year-old high school senior Audrey Jimenez of Tucson, AZ, who had become the first female to win a state championship in the boy's competition this year. By placing second, Jimenez qualified for a spot on the U.S. national team.

### USMC Women's National Championships

A qualifier for Fargo Nationals was the U17 and U20 divisions of the U.S. Marine Corps Women's National Championships that were held in Spokane, WA, in April.

At 53 kg, Wyoming Seminary's Clare Booe fell to Brianna Gonzalez. After winning the first of the best-of-three matches, 7-6, she dropped two technical falls to Gonzalez of California and the University of Iowa. Booe had been ranked No. 2 in the FloWrestling Class of 2024 rankings.

At 59 kg., Easton's Aubre Krazer, who won a first-ever Pennsylvania state title at 130 pounds with a pin over Moon's Haley Smarsh, dropped two straight to 2023 U20 World bronze medalist Alexis Janiak of Illinois.

Pennsylvania women who fell in the U17 finals at the USMC National championships included Wyoming Seminary's Jaclyn Bouzakis of Shavertown, PA, who's ranked first in the country. Bouzakis, whose two older brothers also wrestle, dropped a 10-0 and then 5-3 decision to Morgan Turner at 46 kg. Bouzakis is the 2023 U17 World Bronze medalist while Turner was 2023 U17 World Champion.

At 57 kg, Emma Bacon, of Wyoming Seminary, won the first match against Everest Leydecker, 9-7, before dropping the second and third matches.

At 61 kg, Pennsylvania state champion at 136 pounds, Jordyn Fouse of Bishop McCort in Johnstown lost twice by technical fall to Taina Fernandez. Fouse defeated No. 1 Haylie Jaffe of Kennett to win the first girls Pennsylvania state title at 136.

### Phil Portuese Northeast Regional Tournaments

At USA Wrestling's Phil Portuese Northeast Regional in Atlantic City, NJ in May, a qualifier for the 2024 USMC Junior and 16U Nationals in Fargo, ND, numerous Pennsylvania girls took gold in the Junior Freestyle competition. It included Pennsylvania state champion at 125 lbs, Eliana White-Vega. Other champs from PA included Leyna Rumppler, 170 lbs.; Natalie Rush, 190 lbs.; and Alyssa Favara, 235 lbs.

Pennsylvania girls taking gold in 16U were Katie Mazola, 94 lbs.; Lillian Rumsey, 118 lbs.; Alexis Laut, 124 lbs.; Julissa Ortiz, 130 lbs.; Jameson Strickland, 148 lbs.; and Alaina Claasen, 190 lbs.

**Team Pennsylvania, Junior National Team (2024 Air Force Special Warfare Junior National Duals), Tulsa, OK June 18-22**

**Team Pennsylvania 16U National Team: 2024 Women's National Duals, Westfield, IN, June 19-22:**

**Pictured:** Bentons' Vayle Baker in tough battle with Areana Villaescusa of WCAP ARMY. Vallaescusa won 3-0 in the semis Challenge bracket at 53 KG (117 lbs).

Baker wrestled for the West Point Club and the New York Athletic Club.



## Coaches Can Make a Huge Impact

By Joe Baranik

Many coaches make a strong impression on young boys and girls, acting almost like their mom or dad. They lead by example and though they can be tough on you at times, most coaches genuinely care about you as an individual and they want to see you reach your full potential in your particular sport.



You know a coach has made a huge impact on you and your development when former athletes travel from three different states and far distances from within your own state to attend your funeral. One particular man was our coach, Marty Rusnak. He was the head wrestling coach at Altoona Area High School for 36 years! A principal once told me, "Teaching and coaching is a fine balance between exhaustion and excitement." If you figure he averaged 25 kids on a team each year over that span, he had the opportunity to touch 900 wrestlers' lives and set them on the path to success.

Coach Rusnak's viewing and funeral occurred May 2-3 in Altoona. He certainly had a lot of success stories, starting with coaching his three sons; Marty, John and Mark. Marty and John, better known as Racer and JJ, were both starters on the wrestling team at the U.S. Naval Academy. Mark, the youngest brother, was a starter at the U.S. Coast Guard Academy.

Rusnak coached the four **Benson Brothers; Brad, Todd, Shawn and Troy**. Brad was Altoona's first state champion who went on to place second at the Eastern's wrestling tournament (now known as the EIWAs), and started as a guard for the Penn State football team. He went on to play 10 years with the New York Giants as a Pro Bowler and was one of their key players in the 1986 Super Bowl team. Todd was a runner-up in the PIAA States and played football at Maryland and for a short time he played in the Canadian Football League. Shawn was a stand-out wrestler at Altoona and also played football at Maryland, while Troy was a 2x state qualifier and played football at Pitt and five years with the NY Jets as a linebacker (1985-90). Three of the

Benson boys were able to make it back for the viewing.

Another set of brothers, the **Baranik** brothers, all wrestled for Coach Rusnak and went on to have success as well. Yours truly, was a member of Altoona's only unbeaten team (1975-76) that went 14-0. In fact, we only lost three matches in my three years with the Mt. Lions (1975-78). I went on to start for four years at Lock Haven University and placed third in the 14-team PA Athletic Conference. I also had the opportunity to be an assistant wrestling coach at both the United States Military Academy and Old Dominion University for three years, before starting the Div. II program at St. Andrews University in Lenoir, NC. My brother Dan went on to play football at Shippensburg University and he also spent three years at West Point as an assistant football coach under **Bobby Ross**. Today, he is Director of Football Operations at Elon University in NC. My brother Jimmy earned a wrestling scholarship to the U. of Virginia, where he was a starter for three years. He's now a Director at Crutchfield (Va.), a leader in consumer electronics.

I could fill many pages of kids that Coach Rusnak mentored over his 36 years, but instead will list some highlights that I take pride in knowing that they were part of the Mt. Lion Wrestling Family.

**Steve Maurey** - Altoona's second state champ, wrestled under Dan Gable at Iowa

**Johnny Orr** - 2x runner-up for Princeton University (NJ)

**Terry Fike** - earned a scholarship to Maryland and went on to be a nurse

**Rodger Seemiller** - earned a scholarship to Maryland as a lightweight, and had an outstanding career as a HS

wrestling coach in VA.

**Randy Dick** - earned a scholarship to Pitt and became a pharmacist

**Joe Fraundorfer** - wrestled at Penn State, and went on to be a full bird Colonel in the Air Force Academy

**Randy Eckles** - wrestled at PSU-Altoona and is the CEO of Club Essential Holdings and PrestoSports

**Josh Zimmerman** - earned a scholarship to Bucknell, and went on to be an orthopedic surgeon

**Joe Orr** - wrestled 3 years at Lehigh, and continues to run the family construction business

**Doug Rosenberry** - played football at Harvard and graduated with honors

**Ernie Bonsell** - PIAA runner-up and wrestled at Princeton

**Brett Hayford** - became a nurse anesthesiologist

**Rod Edminston** - earned a scholarship to West Point (NY)

**Vince Russell** - earned a scholarship to West Point

**Rocco Alianiello** - area President of U.S. Foods.

**Louie Sheetz** - former CEO of family Sheetz convenience stores

**Dave Patterson** - wrestled on one of Coach Rusnak's first teams and went on to place in the top 20 in the Boston Marathon 3x and the NY Marathon 5 times. He won the prestigious Philadelphia Marathon in 1981.

*Pictured below L to R:* Doug Rosenberry, Racer Rusnak, Joe Baranik, Jim Baranik, Dan Baranik, JJ Rusnak, Mark Rusnak





## Elling's Opinions



**By: Tom Elling**

Some reflections and/or reports on happenings in our PA wrestling realm.

The National Federation of State High

School Associations Wrestling Rules Committee met earlier this month to discuss potential changes for the 2024-25 season.

The committee is expected to make an announcement at the end of the month.

Some of the proposals included a take-down being awarded three points, near-fall would be two points (for a two count), three (three count) and four (four count); and an out-of-bounds rule where a single point of contact on the mat would allow wrestling to continue.

All three changes would line up with col-legiate wrestling rules.

**NOTE:** These are proposed and not etched in stone.

"Etched in Stone"- the wonderful series by NCAA announcer Jason Bryant has been featuring Gray Simons and his story. I along with Jack Day, Fred Powell, and Billy Martin's sons have contributed to the interview/documentary-style. Don't miss it.

I have been told another consideration is the elimination of the NW AAA Regional. The participating teams would be sent to other qualifiers. I'm guessing Districts 8,9, and 10 would go to the WPIAL and Districts 4 and 6 would qualify through District 3. The school make-up of the NW AAA Region has been becoming smaller and smaller. In the past recent years, wrestlers with just a win or two have 'qualified' for the tournament. During this past year, the first two rounds were replete with mismatches and an outlandish number of falls. I'd hate to see the Region dissolve. Perhaps some new lines could be drawn?

As I work daily on compiling my PA Wrestling Handbook, I have to look twice at some of the make-up of a few tournaments.

Again from the 'everybody-gets-a-

trophy' philosophy, wrestlers who have lost as many as FOUR times still advance to the next PIAA series. Some tournaments have a large number of the same wrestlers competing two weeks in a row. Incidentally, I anticipate adding everyone who has ever qualified for States via a Regional tournament to my book. In case you're wondering about numbers, that equates to about 14,000.

If there is room, I'll also give a modified history of the Bald Eagle-Nittany tournament, the first-ever Christmas Holiday Tournament.

What can we do to get the big numbers of fans we once had? How can we gain new fans? These are questions we in wrestling must ask ourselves and come up with honest answers. I understand that many teams have a problem fielding full teams. Funny how in many of these same areas, the younger divisions are pretty much filled. No matter, we have to rethink what we're doing and (in my opinion) beef up the dual meet season and schedule nearby schools so as to form or continue a rivalry. Our town vs your town excites the entire community. This past season, Bald Eagle Area 'hosted' a dual meet at Lock Haven University. Junior High, Girls and the Boys' varsity teams all competed prior to a Lock Haven University dual meet. That was the first time I've seen an almost-sold out Thomas Field House in many years.

I'd urge high schools to talk to their administrators and have varsity wrestlers take an afternoon to visit the elementary schools and promote the sport. The younger kids truly look up to the older ones and that one or two wrestlers you may never have had would give

the sport a try.

Dr. Jeff Walter addressed one of our recent wrestling breakfasts. He told of his rocky start, of getting pinned all four times in his first competition.

He stuck with the sport along with parental and coaching encouragement. Most know Jeff became a two-time state champion for Shikellamy and an NCAA Champion for the University of Wisconsin.

At the Shikellamy wrestling banquet, the organizers paid a surprise tribute to long-time broadcaster Steve Williams. Steve started with the late Phil Lockuff and this past year when the radio station was going to drop coverage, Steve with the help of many wrestling parents secured community businesses to keep a good thing going. Hat's off to all those involved and congratulations to Steve.

**Below, Left to right:** Tom Elling, Wrestling Ambassador and writer for PWN, Dave McCormack, former standout wrestler at the USMA at West Point who is running for a U.S. Senate seat in PA and John Starr, who's son Sammy Starr wrestles for the USNA in Annapolis.



## The Record Setting NFL Draft; a boost for Wrestling

As a record 275,000 fans were in attendance in Detroit and a national audience on ABC and ESPN. At least three former wrestlers were in the spotlight. First, **Zach Frazier**, a 2x All American center for WVU was the 51st pick by the Pittsburgh Steelers. The panel on ESPN and the ABC Network made a big deal of the fact that Frazier was a 4X State Champ for Fairmont High School in West Virginia and produced a career record of 159-2. Both networks showed graphics of him wrestling and ESPN showed a highlight reel.

Linebacker Peyton Wilson from NC State who got drafted in the 3rd round as the 98th overall pick. Wilson won the Dick Butkus and the Chuck Bednarik Awards in college which go to the top linebacker and the nation's best Defensive Player respectively. He was 3A State Wrestling Champion (220 lbs.) for Orange HS in Hillsborough, NC his junior year. He couldn't wrestle his senior year because he tore his ACL during football season.

The other wrestler who got drafted by the Steelers was Logan Lee, he was a 2x State Champion for Orion High School in Illinois. He played his college football at the University of Iowa. He was drafted in the sixth round as the 178th overall pick as a defensive end. Pittsburgh Steeler defensive line coach Karl Dunbar stated that "I just think guys with the wrestling background, they come in with balance and body control." "And when you play in the interior, whether it be the offensive lineman or defensive line, the wrestling background really helps you because of what you go through." Head coach Mike Tomlin said after taking three former wrestlers out of their seven draft picks, "I've got a lot of respect for that combat sport."



Frazier and Wilson earned an (A) grade in the overall NFL draft, while Lee earned a (C).

### The Steelers 2024 Draft Class:

**Troy Fautanu** – Offensive Tackle – Round 1

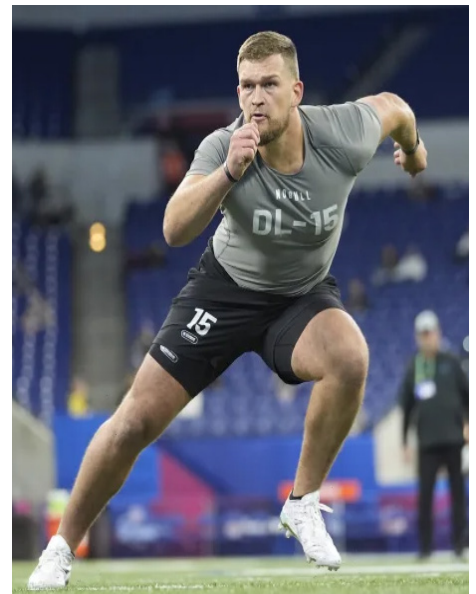
**Zach Frazier** – Center – Round 2 (pictured left)

**Roman Wilson** – Wide Receiver – Round 3

**Payton Wilson** – Linebacker – Round 3 (pictured bottom left)

**Mason McCormick** – Guard – Round 4

**Logan Lee** – Defensive End – Round 6 (pictured bottom right)





## Bishop McCort Accolades

**Bassett/Forest & Miller.** It sounds like a law firm. These three wrestlers from Bishop McCort Catholic High School in Johnstown had a combined record of 166-5 this year. What's even more amazing, Bo Bassett (139) and Jax Forest (127) are sophomores and Melvin Miller (152) is only a freshman! All three were PIAA State champs in 2A. Their mascot "The Crushers" is definitely appropriate. Pictured below right is Jax Forrest (126) of Bishop McCort winning the Powerade Tournament, courtesy of Marc Billett.



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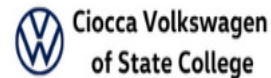
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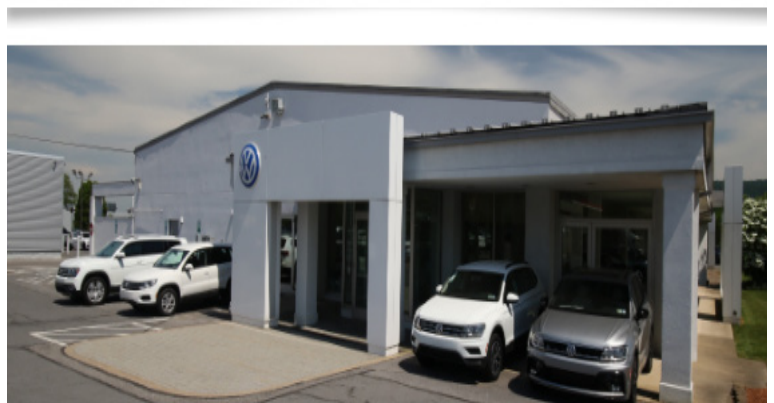
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**Above:**  
**The 2024 inductees for the Pennsylvania Chapter of the National Wrestling Hall of Fame:**

**Front L-R:** Dale Cochran, Bernie Chatman, Bob Ferraro, Jr., Sammy Julian, Cathy Leibensperger  
**Back L-R:** Steve Toboz, Dale Derr, Roger Barrick, George Way




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