

Ben Peterson's regular article will be written by a guest this month, Greco-Roman world champion Mike Houck. Mike wrestled for Ben at the collegiate level at Maranatha Baptist Bible College, where he was a two-time N.C.C.A.A. (National Christian College Athletic Association) national champion. He was also a four-time Greco-Roman national champion and three-time World Team member. Mike made history in 1985 when he became the first American to win a gold medal at the Greco-Roman World Championships. Mike moved on to become the U.S. Greco-Roman National Team Coach from 1990-1995, where was the driving force in starting up the Greco-Roman Resident Athlete Program at U.S. Olympic Training Center.

A Nagging Concern

I have always considered the sport of Greco-Roman wrestling to be a spectacular sport with a wide variety of holds and techniques to master. As an active participant on the U.S. Greco-Roman wrestling team from the late 70's to the mid 90's, I have seen this sport evolve from a very limited amateur club system into a well developed, world-class sport with an ever-growing grassroots base.

This past spring, I decided to attend the World Team Trials in Sioux City, Iowa, after having been retired from the sport for many years. I was sincerely shocked by how drastically the sport has changed! This was my first exposure to the new rules of Greco-Roman wrestling and I did not have a positive reaction.

Once I recovered from my initial state of shock, I watched intently to gain an understanding of what was happening on the mat. I spoke with several coaches and was impressed with how quickly they are adapting their training to compete and be successful under the current rules. Steve Fraser's article in the June 9th, 2006 issue of Win Magazine entitled "Mastering the Reverse Lift Key to Worlds Success" outlined a strategy to enable us to succeed in world competition. I agree with his assessment and would proceed accordingly if I were training world-class wrestlers.

This having been said, I mourn the potential loss of decades of work and growth that could result from the narrow focus of the new rules. Basically it seems that Greco-Roman wrestling has been reduced to a reverse lift, its defense, and a strong aggressive (pummeling) attack on the feet. Granted, the few reverse lift throws I saw were impressive, but the sport has so much more potential!

These new rules limit it to such an extent that I jokingly turned to a friend of mine and said; "This is like watching the Kentucky Derby with all the horses' legs shackled!" I believe this to be an accurate analogy. Some may find such a restricted race exciting, but the full potential of the horses is never realized or experienced. And what would happen to those shackled horses after four to eight years of fettered running, if you took

the shackles off? Would they be able to run freely to the full extent of their capacity, or would they be permanently handicapped? Obviously these horses would be damaged, perhaps permanently, by the limits which impaired their ability to move to the extent of their full potential. The new rules of Greco-Roman wrestling have the potential to limit or handicap the sport.

In my lifetime I've seen American Greco develop and grow on all levels. Twenty-five years ago, we were asking ourselves how realistic it was for us to win World and Olympic medals. Now, the wrestlers our country puts on the mat are consistently in contention for these medals. I credit USA Wrestling for a great portion of this progress because of their support and commitment to the goals of making America a Greco-Roman power.

However, my nagging concern is that under the current rule system, the sport of Greco-Roman wrestling in the U.S. will lose the comprehensive knowledge and skills that took decades to develop, and that what will remain will be a shallow remnant of what American Greco has accomplished to date.

How will the wrestling community as a whole respond to the training of young wrestlers in regard to Greco-Roman wrestling? So much needed knowledge and skills have been gained by America's coaches and athletes. That knowledge must be perpetuated and expanded. I don't think there is a question in anybody's mind that eventually the rules will change. When they do, our coaches and wrestlers must be equipped to meet the challenges of those new rules – whatever they might be.

I urge coaches in their work not to abandon training their athletes in the broad range of Greco-Roman skills that they will inevitably need in the future. This is especially important for those coaches working with younger wrestlers, including high school and college-age wrestlers.

I was once part of an era of Greco-Roman wrestling in America that shared a belief that America could someday dominate the world in this great sport. We've made tremendous progress but we ARE NOT THERE YET. If this vision is still alive, I hope our wrestling community will be forward thinking and respond in such a way as to continue to teach a well-rounded base of Greco skills and techniques, so that when we come out of these current rules, we will be that much closer to world domination.

Mike Houck currently lives with his wife, Bonnie, in Victoria, Minnesota, where he is a teacher and coach. Over the summers, he works as a clinician at Camp of Champs® with his mentor, Ben Peterson. You can contact Mike at Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: info@campofchamps.org; Web: www.campofchamps.org.