

# **Brothers Sharpening Brothers**

## **Or**

# **Building A True Brother Act**

By Olympic Champion John Peterson

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Have you ever wondered why there are so many brothers in the sport of wrestling? There are brothers in many sports, but I think it is safe to say that in the sport of wrestling there are more sets of brothers who excel together than in any other sport. Why is that? I believe I have the answer. Anyone who has been around our sport for more than a few matches has seen it or even felt it as well. Wrestling requires an extreme amount of drive and determination. It is more of a team sport than most team sports. You cannot do well without another “body” to train with. If you can find someone who is willing and able to push you beyond what you are able to push yourself you are onto something! As Proverbs says, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Here are a few of the names that I am watching this year to see how one brother may have pushed another to excel: Sanderson, Churella, Rosholt, Gallick, Schlatter, Sinnott, and many others.

Ben’s recent articles have me thinking about the overwhelming drive brothers have. There have been some great brother combinations throughout the history of wrestling. 1932 Olympic Champion Jack VanBebber’s (Oklahoma State) brother Earl was an NCAA champion in ’41. Our younger brother Dan, Big 8 Champion at ISU, pushed us on the mat in ways most people have never heard about. And, Ben and I were not the only brother combination on the ’72 team. Jim and Dave Hazewinkel competed in Greco Roman. Our 114 lb. teammate Jimmy Carr had older brothers Fletcher and Joe. His younger brother Nate won a bronze in ’88.

There are so many brothers that have been a part of our international teams since 1980. I am sure I have left out some who perhaps are on your list. Lee Roy and his brother John Smith (their brothers Pat and Mark did well in collegiate style), Dave and Mark Schultz, Ed and Lou Banach (brother Steve also wrestled at Iowa), Bill and Jim Scherr, Terry and Tom Brands, Troy and Terry Steiner, Gordy and Marty Morgan, Keith and Aaron Sieracki, Bill and Mike Zadick, Angel and Henry Cijudo. (They are sure to make some noise before their careers are over.)

Hearing stories about some of the great brother combinations of the past motivated Ben and me as we were training. We learned about the Perry brothers from PA- Hugh and Ed each won three national titles for their father, Rex, who was coaching at Pitt. Rex was also a three time national champion at Oklahoma State. Ed was the team leader for the first World Team I competed on in ’71. He told me stories of their tough training methods. Doug Blubaugh (1960 Olympic Champion) was our World Team coach that year, and his stories about training with his brother were incredibly inspirational- heading off across the wheat fields, each carrying a hundred pound sack of grain; running until they dropped! I am still following Doug’s warning to Ben and me to never stop working out because of what happened to his brother after the 1960 Olympic team trials. After losing in the trials, his brother Jack (’55 Pan Am Champion) immediately stopped training and died a year later of unknown causes. Doug said that he thinks it is because his body could not handle the shock of such a sudden change in activity levels. I have been passing that warning on to wrestlers ever since.

Here is another thing that Doug Blubaugh taught me, which I have tried to pass on, however, with little success. Doug hated it when wrestlers called a two-on-one tie a Russian tie. He would say, “The Russians did not invent the two-on-one so why should we give them credit for it!” Speaking of Russians, they have some great brother combinations as well; Belogasov, Kadarzev, Saitiev, Kontoev, Batirov.

Gable loved to talk to us about the Buzzards from Waterloo. Their toughness impressed us and gave us extra motivation to push each other even farther. Bob made the '72 Greco team in Dan's weight class. I like to think that watching the Buzzards and Petersons encouraged Dan, as a coach, to recruit brothers. Since 1980 Iowa wrestling has had 34 sets of brothers. Four of them were sets of three!

Brothers, when they learn to control their natural jealousy and competitive drive toward one another, have an advantage that few others can rival. When two brothers go at it, it is inspiring to watch. Ben and I had that from the start. We had heard about how our older brothers would get out of control from time to time in wrestling practice. Somehow we came to an unwritten agreement that we would not let a wedge be driven between us. On more than one occasion, Ben hit me with a cross face that was perhaps harder than necessary. Instead of reacting with an outburst of anger, I hit him with a double leg of such intensity that he would think twice about taking another cheap shot! When I would get the best of Ben and perhaps let pride get the best of me, he had a way of scrambling out of my moves, which would convince me, yet again, that I was not the lone king of the hill in the Peterson family. I did, however, have that extra drive that you just do not let your younger brother beat you even if he is bigger and stronger. Of course, we all knew who the smarter and quicker wrestler was! However, I knew that I needed to continue to improve, or younger brother Ben would leave me in the dust. Psalm 133:1 was then and continues to be an encouragement to me to check my attitude. "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!"

God used the tough things that we experienced together to give us a love for one another that helped to drive us on the mat in ways that would have never happened without those difficulties. After Ben's broken leg in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, I remember looking out for him in a ways I had not done before. Those visits to the hospital where I had to talk to him through the window I was too young to enter the hospital) or wait for the right nurse who was willing to let me sneak into his room, built a bond that has lasted through the years. Working together in the haymow loosening hay together, cleaning calf pens, shingling houses and barns together all made for times of mutual growth. In '75, a torn tendon in my left bicep kept me off the Pan Am team and out of the World Championships. In '76, I spent 5 days in the hospital with mono and a month with no training, just 18 hours of sleep a day. The day I received the okay from the doctor to continue hard training, he discovered a severe knee infection that almost kept me out of the Olympic trials tournament. Along with my new wife Nancy, Ben and our brother Dan gave me support that kept me going and allowed me to compete in Montreal at a level I could never have imagined by myself!

Love is the greatest motivator. Yes, jealousy, competitive drive, and anger can serve to cause some to excel. However, when brothers have a deep love for one another they have an incentive that is tough to match. That kind of love can be shared by teammates as well. Dan Gable took me under his wing just like a brother after the '71 World Championships. Living with him in his Ames apartment, working out together, traveling with him to special events, provided me with the extra edge that I needed coming out of a small college background. Ben and I know that without Dan we would never have made the '72 team, let alone won medals!

Through the years, wrestlers who do not have brothers have developed that same kind of special bond that makes for exceptional accomplishments together. Isn't it great as a coach or fan to watch those relationships develop? You will see them again this year at the national tournaments, and Olympic trials. Enjoy the matches that are the result of hours and hours of iron sharpening iron!

**\*Ben & his brother John now run Camp of Champs Wrestling Camps. Contact them at: Camp of Champs, PO Box 222, Watertown, WI 53094; Phone: 800-505-5099; E-mail: [info@campofchamps.org](mailto:info@campofchamps.org); Web: [www.campofchamps.org](http://www.campofchamps.org)**