

# Building Confidence - Our 2<sup>nd</sup> Year

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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*In these articles you will read of experiences that brought my brother, John, and I from an 80-acre dairy farm in northern Wisconsin to 2 Olympics. If you have comments or questions let me know. I pray this will in some way encourage other young men to reach for the very best.*

As John and I finished our first year of wrestling, news came that our head football and wrestling coach was leaving to lead a Minnesota Junior College football program. At first we wondered about our future. Coach Rutter had not been very knowledgeable about wrestling; he just knew it was good for his football players, and football he coached well.

Then it was announced that Jack Walsh was coming to Cumberland to lead both our football and wrestling programs. At first, there was some apprehension and distrust. He was coming from Ladysmith and the Lumberjacks were our rivals.

## Building Confidence in Strength

Before we ever met Coach Walsh we received a letter from him urging us to workout during the summer. Our oldest brother, Phil, arrived home from the University of Wisconsin and promptly went to work with the set of York barbells he had purchased the previous summer. He was training for Big 10 football. John immediately was lifting with Phil. Their pace was more demanding than I wanted on a daily basis so I often avoided the basement weight room when they were lifting. **Years later I realized Phil was teaching us how to be ahead of our time in using lifting as a key part of our training. But it would be another two full years before I would really make lifting my own passion.**

## Building Confidence in a Coach

Just before school began we got acquainted with Coach Walsh by moving his family into a temporary house he was renting. Later in the year we moved them again into a more permanent home. A few years later we moved him again into the home he has lived in ever since. John and I and several teammates were getting acquainted with the man who would truly teach us wrestling. We learned of his occasional eccentric ways and realized he wanted credit for our success. **But we also knew Coach Walsh cared deeply about us as students and athletes and was able and willing to help us reach our own goals.**

## Building Confidence in Techniques

John recalls something new in the wrestling room: technique charts. Various techniques were posted on the stage wall where we practiced. Each move was shown step by step in pictures so we could see the entire progression of the move. It may have been our first time to see techniques broken down that way. We were expected to drill through several of them each day. I think John was more faithful on those than I was. Later when we saw whole books of techniques we absorbed them like sponges.

To this day I still recall many of the moves Coach Walsh taught us. A “turk leg-hook” to a pin was useful all the way to the Olympics. John still teaches the pinning combination called “The farmer” to our campers as his favorite move. A “cornell drop” to finish a single, a “whizzer” and a “navy ride” all began with Coach Walsh. These moves scored many a point for us and now are helping those we coach.

But the best move of all was “the double leg takedown”. John mastered it in every way. We kept refining and building options from it through college and world competition. Today John is a master teacher of doubles at our camps. Coach Walsh made us believe in the double.

Another thing John remembers is the climbing rope in the corner of the gym put up just for the wrestlers. Coach emphasized both strength and techniques. He wanted us to be able to complete the proper moves we were drilling daily.

### **Building Confidence through Competitions**

By Christmas break John, a junior, was 4-0 with 3 pins. I was 2-1, as a sophomore. A key thing I remember was our first reaction when Coach scheduled a dual with Superior. We knew their enrollment was 5 times as big as ours. The upper classmen protested. But Coach insisted we were ready and it was the way to learn and gain confidence.

For some reason I was not in the line-up against Superior. I did travel with the team the 2 hours up to Superior. Walking the hallways seemed forever. It was a new building with the classrooms making a complete circle on each side of the circular hallway. Halfway around we wondered if we were going to be late, because it seemed so big to us. We quickly picked up our pace.

Coach knew what he was doing. We won all but one match and went home high as a kite. Coach told everyone of our win. **In the front of the team scorebook are still written the names and phone numbers of area radio and TV stations. I am sure they all knew of our victory.** We wrestled Superior in February at home and again won convincingly, 38-6. Never again would we fear a team or a man just because they happened to be bigger than us.

Coach Walsh also started an Invitational Tournament. **Wrestling on our old horsehair mat as well as our new resillite mat made it memorable. But winning made the biggest impression!** Coach knew what he was doing in scheduling. He was helping us build confidence.

John finished with a 10-1 dual meet record and 7 pins. My dual meet record was 6-3-1 with 6 pins. Harry Rhodes from Chetek pinned me. He would be a state champion 2 years later. Except for that, it was definite improvement from the previous year when I finished 0-7, being pinned every time. Our team finished 9-2. Our overall records with tournaments are lost for now, but in the end we can say our confidence skyrocketed that year.

### **In Summary**

We were learning that as men with various God-given abilities, we could learn and progress. Wrestling was giving us a means to verify that progress. We knew to continue this progress we would need to improve the physical strength of the bodies God had given us. John determined to increase his weight lifting with Phil for another summer. I followed them when it was convenient. We often talked about wrestling along with our football since moves now had names and descriptions.

We appreciated our Coach, Jack Walsh. He was not perfect, but we knew he cared about us. When he let a captain or wrestler lead us in the Lord's Prayer before matches, we saw he honored the God we also desired to obey. This was also important to us.

The wrestling season was really not over. It just changed to the weightlifting part of the year where we prepared for the times when again we could prove ourselves on the football field and the wrestling mats.

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