

Where Did the Peterson Roll Come From?

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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For years John and I have regularly been asked, “Which one of you invented the Peterson Roll?” We both know it existed before us. Because of this, a couple of years ago I decided to find an answer and wrote an article called “Who Invented the Peterson Roll?” The article was first published in WIN and then in 3 other wrestling magazines. I received responses from others and believe I have some interesting explainable perspectives about where the move and its name came from.

The First “Peterson Roll”

Various coaches and competitors tell of a move called the “Peterson Roll” being used in the 1930’s, 40’s and 50’s. Ron Gray, NCAA Champion for Iowa State University in ’58 and ’59, tells as a freshman in high school of “...checking out a book on wrestling from our library (Eagle Grove, IA) and studying all the pictures and descriptions of...the ‘Peterson Roll’.” So a Peterson had wrestled before John and I and had made enough of a mark to have a move called after him and put in print. Coach Dick Horst of Leesport, PA, wrote me about what he heard from his coach, Bud Lindholm of Leigh University. “...Bud once told me that a successful wrestler, on the level of the YMCA tournament series, by the name of Peterson, made the Peterson Roll popular. I am guessing that this took place during the 1940’s and 50’s.”

Ron Gray and Dick Horst describe this “Peterson roll” as follows:

- 1) Bottom wrestler would grasp and control the wrist around his waist with his right hand.
- 2) Turning into his opponent, the bottom wrestler reaches with his free/left arm and wraps it around his opponent’s left thigh from the outside to the inside and locks his hands together.
- 3) Opponent is put to his back with a rolling/sitting motion while keeping hands locked.

Many did this move during the mid 1900’s. However, by the time I got serious in wrestling I was told not to grab the outside/far leg. Counters made the move inferior and susceptible to a pin. But initially this was the “Peterson Roll.”

Transition To a Better Way

During the 1950’s and 60’s there was a transition by several from grabbing the opponent’s left/far leg with the left arm to going between the opponents legs to control his right/near leg. Coach Bob Morris of Spencer, IN, wrote me about making this transition. Coach Ken Meinschein of Southgate, MI, wrote me of his working through this “metamorphosis of moves.”

Coach Les Anderson of Iowa State tells me of drilling rolls with the inside leg control while he was in high school in the 50’s. Coach Paul Ehrhard of Albert Lea, MN, wrote me about learning the tight right wrist control and inside/right leg control roll early on because, “...I was fortunate to be on the clinic staff of many of the big clinics.”

The Granby Roll which Billy Martin and others perfected certainly made this transition. To Ken Meinschein and others, it was called the “Grub Granby.” I believe early on this new roll was connected to the Granby Roll and was often called a “Granby Roll variation.” I used that terminology myself before I heard it called the “Peterson Roll.”

Description of the improved roll:

- 1) Bottom wrestler grasps and controls the wrist around his waist with his right hand.
- 2) Turning into opponent he reaches between his opponent’s legs with free/left arm and wraps his left arm around opponent’s right thigh from the inside to the outside.
- 3) Rolling and/or sitting motion puts opponent to his back.

Where I learned the Move

Very little quality rolling was being done in northern Wisconsin when I was in high school so we did few rolls. My introduction to rolls came in college at Iowa State University. I quickly learned and began to use what I call “Extension Rolls”:

- 1) A strong right wrist control.
- 2) Blocking or trapping opponent’s leg with my left leg (not with my arm).
- 3) Thrusting forward with leg power.

I didn’t control my opponent’s inside/right leg with my left arm until after my opponent was thrown to his back by my leg thrust. Then I grasped the inside/right leg to gain control and back points.

Our 118 pounder, Steve Lampe, tells in the February 15, 2007 issue of Wrestling USA how in the spring of 1969 (my freshman year) he worked to, “...figure out a way to secure a Granby cradle position without going over the shoulders en route...” Steve figured out the value of wrist control and inside leg control. Coach Nichols had Steve show the move to me. I did not grasp all Steve was doing and especially setups and sit-through finishes. Today I wish I had been a better student at that point.

My Conclusion

So, why is the name “Peterson Roll” used today on a move many have called a Granby Roll variation? The following points will tell that story:

- 1) The name “Peterson Roll” was connected to an earlier version of the move.
- 2) When an improved variation was made many transferred the name.
- 3) As the new “Peterson Roll” was developing and getting popular, I competed in two Olympics.

With a lot of work, moves from others and God’s help, my brother John and I were blessed to come home with medals.

- 4) I did a lot of rolls and even rolled Levan Tediashvili in one of the Olympic Finals matches. On NBC TV Ken Kraft called it “Ben’s Signature Move.” I have been connected to rolls ever since.
- 5) For over 3 decades, I have been teaching rolls at camps and clinics from coast to coast.

Today it is easy to see how I got connected and have been given credit for inventing the move. I just wanted to do my best for family, team and country. Thank you for honoring me with the name and even thinking I invented the “Peterson Roll” – but I didn’t!

Well, I have told the “Peterson Roll” story as I see it. The truth is out and I can sleep at night. I would enjoy hearing your insights. I would love to teach rolls to your wrestlers. I’ll teach more than the “Peterson Roll” and I’ll tell the truth – “I didn’t invent it!”

***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; Web: www.campofchamps.org**