

Senior State Memories!

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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Anyone who has competed in a wrestling state tournament has a story to tell. I don't think any 2 are alike. It was my second. My previous junior year trip had taught me a lot. Two losses by fall told me it was serious business and only for the skilled and prepared.

Our older brother Phil had reported to the Army the previous fall. He called a week ahead to tell our Mother he would see us on Friday for the state tournament. His passes and tickets were all in order. I was elated!

We spent most of a day in travel from northern Wisconsin and went straight to the field house. I checked weight, got a workout, checked weight again and then ate only enough to be able to hold weight for the next morning's weigh-in. A good night's sleep in the biggest hotel I had ever been in was next.

It was a 2 day tournament with 16 qualifiers in each weight from over 300 teams across the state. The State was all one division. The field had been narrowed from 32 Regionals, where each qualified 2, to 8 different Sectionals. Then each of the 8 Sectionals qualified 2 to State. Since I had won our Sectional, I would wrestle a 2nd place finisher of another Sectional in the first round at 180#.

Friday morning I arrived early. I weighed just under 183# and then ate a good breakfast. It was important to arrive early at the field house to warm up and get used to the mats and the bigness of the setting. For 12 months I had visualized this place and was anxious to get back into it and play my sport to the full. I knew I was much more prepared than the previous year. I was anxious to prove to myself as much as to others that the year of training had not been in vain.

Brother John, a freshman at U.WI Stout, came with very disturbing news as I warmed up. He told me Phil was not going to make it. Phil's General was disciplining some soldiers. Phil had not done wrong but he still couldn't come. Not understanding the army, I remember being very disappointed, but figured the seriousness of army life during the Vietnam Era was enough to cause such. I knew Phil was greatly disappointed! The best thing I could do was win and encourage him that way.

Coach Walsh and I shifted full attention to winning each round. Wanting to motivate me, he said, "Every win from now on will be worth \$1,000 to you." I laughed and brushed it aside as a reference to a scholarship. Later on I had to acknowledge that his motivating prediction had truth to it.

The first match was not easy but encouraging with a solid win. After a break, lunch and a nap we were back for the evening round. Again, a hard fought match gave me a solid win. My year of lifting, running and dreaming was paying off. I now could fatigue and control the best wrestlers from other corners of the state. Weight was checked and a corresponding bite to eat was had before getting a good night sleep.

Early morning weigh-ins had us up and in the hotel lobby early. John met me there with extra excitement. Being a slow riser I didn't respond on the same level. But he insisted I follow him around the corner where, to my surprise, we found Phil. But Phil was not dressed as I imagined in his Army uniform. He looked overly tired and a bit unkempt in an old black coat. But he was still a great sight to me. After a brief greeting he left with John to get a nap and clean up. I left

for weigh-ins. I had no idea what he had gone through to get from Kentucky to Madison, Wisconsin.

Arriving for weigh-ins I discovered I was 2 ½ pounds under weight. I must have been very anxious to lose so much over night. Thinking everyone was so big and strong at state, I was embarrassed to weigh-in, so I hesitated and waited. Maybe the others wouldn't wait to watch the scale tip for me. Boy was I surprised! Watching each of the 8 still alive in my weight (4 semifinalists and 4 wrestlebacks) I was the heaviest of them all. Amazing what sticks in our memories years later. Amazing what is so significant to a youth.

That morning brought me competition with a very tall, strong wrestler from Luxemburg-Casco, one of the more successful teams in the state. He got on top of me and quickly put me in a crossbody legride. The previous year I had been unprepared for this move and its punishing ability to fatigue an opponent. But at Christmas time, Mike, a teammate of my older brothers who had been wrestling in college, taught me the same move. During a 3 day period before he returned to college Mike taught me to arch for power and then move and adjust for punishment and turning. I knew I had to get out quickly and get on top myself or my opponent would have me too exhausted to be a threat. After a couple switching attempts, I succeeded and immediately put the same crossbody legride on him. But I was already feeling the fatigue and was not used to doing the move on this caliber of an opponent. The match was an exhausting hard fought event where at the end we were both oxygen deficient. I turned him for back points during it all and won 7-0. Afterwards I remember thinking every mile and every sprint the previous year had been worth it. And Mike's leg riding technique had saved the day for me. I left confident I could both counter and use leg riding from now on. My knowledge of that move was going to be key in some of the most pivotal matches of my life.

Exhausted by the win, I caught my breath and prepared for the next match. After briefly greeting my family a snack and a nap were important. I was in the finals of the Wisconsin State Wrestling Tournament! I would be facing Rich Hinebaugh from Monroe. I knew it was big. *Rich had pinned me the previous year at State* on his way to second place. For 12 months, almost daily, I had thought about him as I trained. Rich was undefeated, as I was, and rated #1 all year.

Next article will highlight that finals match and the pivotal point it played in my entire 16 years of high school, college and Olympic competition and maturity as a man. I pray other competitors will be encouraged to deal with each of their challenges as they identify with the experiences described.

You can find other articles by Ben & John at their web site. Today Ben & his brother John 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