

Seldom Sung Heroes

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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As a season progresses for most any sport, team leaders begin emerging. When the accolades are handed out the leaders are recognized and indeed they should be. After all, they illustrate and symbolize for us the best of our striving and achievements.

However, there are some who may not set records and be consistent winners. Others may far out-do them in the record book. But in our minds, if we are honest, there are others that should be recognized and honored because they also exhibit the best of our strivings. Please enjoy 3 of my "Seldom Sung" memories.

1) I had been coaching for a half-dozen years or so at a small college here in Wisconsin called Maranatha Baptist Bible College. The college had between 500 and 700 students. We had some very good, hard working wrestlers and I felt we could prepare them to compete with the very best on a college level. But without scholarships I had little thought that we could gather a team to beat a D1 team. We set our schedule accordingly. Almost every dual would stretch us and I picked some tournaments where all could compete and a couple that would stretch our very best wrestlers.

In the mid 1980's we had strong team balance. Several wrestlers were talented but not necessarily driven in wrestling. They had many other goals as well, but they did like to wrestle. The next thing I know we are winning each dual.

The toughest dual for us was Loras College. The night we faced them was memorable. Since we were a young college with limited facilities we occasionally wrestled in our wrestling room, which was a former elementary gym. To say it was small and loud would be an understatement.

I looked over our lineup and knew our middle weights would be our strongest. After a couple pins we took a nice lead. I debated where to put my Captain. I decided 177#. That left 190# to a rather quiet unassuming young man by the name of Terry. Terry would have been 10+ pounds under weight. My hope was he and our heavyweight would not get pinned and save us some points from the much stronger football players who were prancing across the mat with a glare looking anxious for the kill. Terry had a different idea.

Terry didn't try any great moves, just a solid takedown and steady ride. He used arm-bars and near-wrists to ride his opponent to extra riding time. And when his opponent finally had a chance to be on top he was too mad and tired to keep his senses. Terry reversed and rode him some more. By the end of this match Terry was the hero. The screaming students, backslapping teammates and proud coaches all knew Terry was the hero of the night. Terry didn't win more than a couple other matches but 25 years later anyone who was there that night remembers Terry Lester as the hero! We finished the season 11-0 in duals.

2) Warren Brokering came to our college a bit later. He had met me at a University of Michigan summer camp. Desiring to honor the Lord with his life he chose Maranatha to train to be a Youth Pastor.

While growing up Warren's extra energy stretched his Mother many times. Like my Dad, she saw wrestling as a way to keep her son from trouble. Competing was Warren's passion plus he always had a good sense of humor. School work was hard for Warren. The next thing I knew Warren was ineligible and couldn't wrestle. Then he was told to sit out for a while and evaluate whether he really should be in college. But Warren was a fighter. He came back. When grades

were a problem again I sat down and discussed with him the need to retake the courses he had barely passed.

“Warren, you can’t raise your overall grade point average until you raise those low grades” I said.

He replied, “Coach that means hundreds of more dollars I must pay.”

“Yes, I know, and I know you have to personally pay it, but it is the only way”, I insisted.

Warren retook the classes and fought back to be eligible a couple more semesters and finally graduated. I do not remember Warren winning any big event or being the leader on our Team. But after graduation, Warren served as a Youth Pastor for 20 years. He understood the struggles young people face. He told them of the change Christ made in his life. A few years ago he contracted cancer. He continued his youth work until his treatments and lack of energy hindered him too much. His doctor asked him to be the Chaplain to his cancer patients. So for the last couple years of his life, Warren worked faithfully pointing sick people and their families to the hope he had found in Jesus Christ.

Warren was not the team hero though his good humor was enjoyed by our team. But anyone who knows Warren compliments the way he gave all of us hope and an example of never giving up. Two time Olympian Jim Gruenwald will refer to Warren as a great inspiration in his own wrestling training and maturity as a man.

3) The 2009 National Duals gave me a definite Seldom Sung Hero. Southern Oregon Coach Mike Ritchey had just guided his wrestlers to a tie score with returning NAIA Champions, Lindenwood University. Rushing to the score table he quickly listened for and verified the tie breaker.

From across the mat the Coach Ritchey began calling for one of his wrestlers by name and then congratulated him for winning the dual by tie breaker for them. Who was this individual? Someone who won by fall? Someone who won by scoring many nearfalls and a technical fall?

No, it was a young man who had fought to stay off his back. Evidently he was thrashed pretty hard by his opponent. A win was not possible for him. But the tie breaker that made the difference was the least nearfalls.

Yes, other team members were recognized by the coach for scoring the team points that brought the team score to a tie. But so was the one who just survived without being turned. His coach and teammates honored him that day!

I urge coaches, parents, captains, teammates, administrators and fans to recognize such performances by younger, less gifted or less prominent team players. They may never be your leader. But they may go on in some totally different area and make a difference. Your encouragement and recognition could be the reward that encourages them and others to keep fighting to the end whenever they are the underdog.

Make a difference - remember “Seldom Sung Heroes!”

You can find other articles by Ben, John & Andy Peterson at their web site. Today they 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