

## Developing Resolve! Or The Making of a Confident Wrestler

By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

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Following is the story of my brother John's introduction to our National Team. It is a great example of the progress of an athlete's confidence. Building lasting resolve requires dealing with various issues that could distract you later.

John's high school and college careers were hardly proof he was ready for international wrestling, but they left him with a desire to do more. He was a good high school wrestler, but failed to qualify for State. Finishing 2<sup>nd</sup> in the Midlands his senior year in college gave him hopes of a National Championship. But his 5<sup>th</sup> place in the NAIA left him disappointed.

John had attended the World Team Training Camp for a weekend the previous summer. Dan Gable worked out with him. Later in the fall Dan told me John needed to train in a more challenging place to build his skills and confidence.

When John came home a college graduate **the big debate began**, "Should John wrestle any more?" **The Army debate** came up first. Should John join the Army and see if he could be a part of the All Army Team. The Vietnam War was calling for all the able men possible. Would that be the way to serve his country?

With an NCAA Title and 3<sup>rd</sup> in the Pan AM Team Trials I would be going to Florida in mid July for the Pan AM Training Camp. I offered to call Coach Doug Blubaugh and ask if John could join me. Coach's reply, "If he pays for his plane ticket he can train with America's best." Thank you Coach Blubaugh!

Our college summer job was shingling for the Barron lumberyard. Debates started on barn roofs, but soon were in the weight room as we had evening workouts together.

**We debated weight.** John had been losing 25+ pounds to make the 167# class. One day he emphatically stated he was not going to cut to 163# in freestyle. That was fine with me. To me the 180.5# class seemed perfect for him.

**A debate on a tractor** was meaningful a week before leaving for Florida. Our habit since high school football was a mile run to Comstock, a brief rest and several sprints home. While resting on a couple tractors parked next to the highway, John compared himself to America's best wrestlers and asked again why he should be going. My impatient response that evening was, "Don't compare yourself to someone else. They may be headed for failure." John thought a moment, then got off the tractor anxious to sprint. I am sure I did not beat him that night. He had a new resolve. Make it or not, he was going.

**A debate over cost** was settled at the airport ticket counter when John learned of an extra \$64 charge. After a moment's thought John responded, "I have come this far, I am not turning back now."

A couple weeks into training I noticed Gable chose John to go hard with while I watched from the side. Jealousy started raising its ugly head in my mind. After thinking it through I concluded, "This is great! John will develop significantly training with Dan."

The truth was John had learned to work. He had taught himself to keep working and keep his hope alive. As a man he would have doubts. He wanted to do more in wrestling but past failures often brought doubts. He listened to others and was willing to take advice and keep trying.

With a month working his doubleleg takedowns with the Pan America Team, John was ready to enter the Pre World Team Camp Tournament. His first attempt showed promise, but not qualification. Someone suggested he try Greco. After his initial protest that he had never wrestled Greco, he stated, "I have come this far. Why not?" By lack of participants he entered the World Training Camp.

With a few more days of training the final Team Trials began. Each match went the limit with John's condition running past his opponents by the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> period, nothing fancy, just relentless doublelegs. A couple of the 3 or 4 opponents had defeated him a week earlier. He built confidence in each match.

Jack Zindell was the final man. He had defeated me in the NCAA's 2 years earlier for 3<sup>rd</sup> place. But this time he did not have the condition needed to hold off John. Coming from behind, John won in the final seconds. He was the 180.5# World Team member heading for Sofia, Bulgaria!

At the end of the camp I was on my way home and back to Iowa State University for my senior year. Russ Hellickson had defeated me for the 198# class. He would be a bronze medallist.

My team acquaintance and friendship with Dan Gable and the summer of training had brought Dan and John together. They would room together on the international trip. That new friendship was going to develop significantly.

John's experience in Bulgaria was meaningful. It gave him a measuring stick of what was required of an international competitor, but there were no victories for him. However, he watched Gable win the World Championships and that was significant. An American can win at the world level!

Upon return, John called me with a new debate. "Gable has asked me to come to Ames, Iowa, and train freestyle all winter in order to make the Olympic Team next summer. Ben, what do you think I should do? Should I join Dan?" My response: "Duh. Of course! That's a no-brainer."

John's hard work, repeated attempts, listening and learning from others and using opportunities to train with tough people were essential. Then Dan's repeated words of encouragement and actions to back up his statements, step by step built John's confidence to new heights.

I would be amiss not to say there was repeated prayer along the way. John, our parents and family, and many Christian friends repeatedly asked for God's blessing and direction for us. God answered those prayers and more!

I tell this story often and write it here for you as an encouragement and reminder to:

1. Learn to work hard.
2. Use opportunities to learn from the best.
3. Listen to words of advice and encouragement.
4. "...with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Philippians 4:6b
5. Think through and deal with each issue that could distract your focus.

Making the most of these matters will build confidence and resolve as you climb to higher levels in wrestling and life. Winning these debates early will be most helpful.

You can find other articles by Ben at the following web sites: [www.campofchamps.org](http://www.campofchamps.org) & [www.TheCompetitor.org](http://www.TheCompetitor.org)

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