

During the Cold War Era I had the privilege to travel and compete in the Soviet Union 3 times. There were various experiences that were very unique to me and our U.S. Teams.

I was introduced to the Eastern European Sauna experience on my first trip. I didn't need to cut weight that much, but since the Tbilisi Tournament was in late January, I would use the sauna to warm up. My Swedish body would get chilled to the bone at times. So what better quicker way to get warm than to go to the sauna with my teammates?

Soon I was going to be told by the Soviet wrestlers that a real man also used the cold tub. The plan was - get real warm in the sauna, then jump into the cold water for a few minutes and then get back in the sauna. The cold-water jolt was to be healthy, clean out the body, invigorate the being. Eventually I was supposed to enjoy and relax in the cold water.

Our Sauna Experience:

Wrestling experiences for John and I had the hot and cold contrast elements. After John made the 1971 World Team and watched Dan Gable win the World Championships they returned to Iowa State to train for the next summer's Olympics. I was preparing for my senior college season with the hopes of a 2nd NCAA Championship at 190# and the National Team Championship. The practice room at ISU was exceptional that year. There were young upcoming All Americans and past Champions under the training of Coaches Nichols and Anderson. Gable and John returned from Tbilisi with reports of victories over the powerful Soviet wrestlers. John had a couple victories of his own and Dan had amazed the Soviets. With Carl Adams, Chris Taylor and myself winning the NCAA's plus other All Americans, we came home with the National Team Championship. Confidence was high. It had been building all year. It was a comfortable and most enjoyable place to be training – like sweating in a nice warm sauna.

Our Cold Water Jolting Experience:

We all wanted more wrestling. Gable was focused totally on the Olympics and John was seeking to keep in stride with Dan. Within 3 weeks of the NCAA's we were all at the National Freestyle Tournament looking to continue the positive "sauna experience." Our wrestling was progressing continually. Our confidence was high and our dreams higher yet. But, we were about to experience what wrestling's highest level was all about. Like jumping into a tub of cold water, John and I were about to see reality.

We each got some early victories. Many complimented John & me on placing 4th in the Senior Nationals. But the way we each lost one match jolted us to the core.

I lost to Bill Harlow. Bill had been an NCAA Champion for Oklahoma State and a World Team member. He did high crotches relentlessly on me and gave me a 9-0 loss. I was not on his level. My, what a jolt, what a contrast from the NCAA's!

John lost 15-0 to Steve Combs. Yes, Steve had been on the Olympic Team 4 years before, but John felt like he was not even in the same league. John had repeatedly been thrown to his back. How could he be that far behind after all the work he had done all year?

How could we catch up in 1½ months for the Olympic Trials? We spoke of being done with wrestling. John's money was low. Maybe it was time to quit, go home and get on with life.

For a couple days Gable listened to our reasons to never get back in the cold water again. It had been "too cold, too painful, too jolting." Then he told John that he was getting caught on his double as he was lifting. John should change direction, turn down and buckle the knees, instead of lifting so much. For weeks John drilled that change on me until the back of my knees were raw. I paid extra attention to keeping my elbow down and bent on underhooks and collarties. I had to stop Bill Harlow from getting under my elbow so easily.

There was one more issue I brought up. "I am too small for 198#." I wanted John to go down to 163# and let me go at 180.5#. He would have none of it. He had dealt with that issue the year before and proved again that Petersons wrestle best not cutting weight. I pushed until he said, "Then we will wrestle for it." It was the closest we would get to an official match during our 16 years of wrestling competition. It was a private match with a teammate as the official. John won by 1 point. To this day I thank him! I was running from the jolt experience instead of learning and stepping up to the new level.

John's money problem was resolved with a part-time job preparing the field for the University baseball team. We continued to train. Our hopes were rebuilt and we continued to improve.

Olympic Trials Results:

John beat Steve Combs 7-0 in a steady controlled use of attacking with a double in a low disciplined position. For me – I did not see Bill Harlow for 36 years. Because of his teaching, coaching and responsibilities to his young family, training was not his priority. At age 29 he never competed again.

Stepping to a higher level in wrestling and in life can be a startling experience. The first results chase many away. Starting high school wrestling, college wrestling, making your team, trying Freestyle and Greco or beginning a new career can bring some eye opening results. If you are shortsighted, personally insecure or without encouragement from others, you may give up and never try that experience again. Or you can learn from the experience, make adjustments, try again and reach for new heights.

My advice to young wrestlers is to work through the jolting experiences. God has given you skill and opportunities that need time, much learning and significant adjustments. Be willing to keep your confidence going long enough and sufficient enough to live through the jolts of life. And don't forget to help others who have been jolted. A stable encouraging friend can make all the difference. There are some great victories waiting for those who don't run from new challenges that at first try may bring a heart wrenching, bone chilling result.

As for the European cold water after the sauna, I have never enjoyed it, but it is supposed to be healthy. So today I finish a warm morning shower with cool water. It is a jolt that wakes me up for the day.