

Celebration of the Dan Gable Legacy
By Olympic Champion Ben Peterson

#69

A tribute given at the June 4, 2011 Celebration of the Dan Gable Legacy

It is my extreme honor to speak this evening. No doubt many others would like to and could speak as well or better concerning the following topics which were requested of me:

1. What it was like to be a teammate of Dan's at ISU and during the 1972 Munich Olympics.
2. What Dan meant to me personally.
3. What Dan means to the sport of wrestling.

There were so many factors that were pulling at young athletes at Iowa State in the late 60's and early 70's. The wrestling program pulled things together for me. Coaches Nichols and Anderson gave stability and focus to us wrestlers in a sea of Vietnam turmoil and hippie movement change.

Dan was the focal point of many things to us ISU wrestlers. Being 2 years ahead of me Dan had been very successful long before I even met him. He showed us what was needed to be successful and he proved it could be done. I soon learned ISU wrestling meant business. Practice was not play time. Dan was first the team captain and upper classman. Later he became a Graduate Assistant Coach. He was captain, workout partner, and an extra coach – he did it all. Dan was a dividing line in the practice room. If you wanted to learn and get better you got closer to Dan. If you wanted to avoid work, you avoided Dan. I guess a few of us were crazy and gravitated toward him. Yet when we got close to Dan we found him gracious and patient.

Dan took much of the limelight at ISU. I recall taking a 3-day road trip out east. The newspaper read, "Dan Gable and Company." Dave Martin, a runner-up the year before, commented to returning NCAA Champions Jason Smith and Chuck Jean that even national championships didn't count much next to Gable. But when Dan lost his one match, teammate Chuck Jean stated it for all of us. "Gable worked twice as hard as any of us. There is no justice in this. If I could, I would give him my National Championship!"

As Dan got into the World and Olympic scene his confidence escalated even more and so did his knowledge of the sport and coaching it. John and I were in the right place at the right time to benefit from that. If you have read my articles in recent W.I.N. magazines, you know what Dan meant to us. Dan was never content. He always wanted to do things better. Dan was our teammate, workout partner, our captain, our drill sergeant, our coach and our friend. There was a balance of very high expectations and gracious patience for us to try and fail, try and learn and try

and succeed. For 4 years Dan practiced being a coach on me and for 1 ½ years on John. Dan and his parents opened their home to us the summer of the Munich games in such a way we will never forget. We became family.

People have asked us if we were surprised at Dan's success as a coach at the University of Iowa. Our answer, "not at all – but we were amazed at how quickly his success came."

Our oldest brother Phil misunderstood Dan when he came to watch an ISU dual. After the match Phil asked me, "Why did Dan sit on the floor and not on the bench with the rest of the team?" I didn't find it strange that Dan was on the floor in front of our bench. After his match he would sit on the floor and cheer the rest of us on. He was our coach and cheerleader. In 1972 Phil saw us carry Dan off the mat after he'd secured his gold medal. Dan's response as we were carrying him off was "Put me down! I came to win and I did. Now, put me down!" He was so matter of fact about it. But later, when he thought of the success of others of us, he choked up with emotion and pride.

As a boy I learned that my dad was strong and stable. I also learned that he was gracious and loving. That gave me security and the desire to be close to him. Dad taught us about a powerful God, and also about His perfect love for us. That balance is important in anyone! When we met Dan, we saw him also seeking to balance his strength and his patience.

Dan, you have shown balance to the world of wrestling as a wrestler, as a coach, as a friend and as a family man. You exhibited and taught us to be stronger and tougher than I could ever have imagined and yet I know no one more committed to his family than you.

Dan, when people see and hear of you from a distance they sometimes misunderstand your drive, your discipline and your heart. But when they get closer there has been so much to learn and enjoy.

Dan, I pray you have many more years to show us the heart of a Champion, which to you has always been the heart of a winning wrestler and the heart of a family man! Thank you!

You can find other articles by Ben at the following web sites: www.campofchamps.org & www.TheCompetitor.org
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