



## FROM PINS TO PEN . . . AS I SEE IT!

By Wade Schalles

**B**uried among the smoke of proportionality and amidst the efforts of wrestling's leadership to fell the feline Goliath is buried the enigma of damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't.

I've been wondering of late if the damned-if-we-do didn't get mixed some time ago with our damned-if-we-don't?

It seems wrestling's male population is fighting women over what they view to be unfair, that the development of women's programming at the demise of the men's is wrong. No argument from me on that point but there seems to be two "unfair's" at work here. One that says it's okay that women have never been invited to the party and the other one, which indicates it's acceptable to reduce men's opportunities. Neither is acceptable but of the two, if there's no alternative, it is more right to feed those that have seldom eaten than allow those who have gorged themselves over the years to continue eating.

Women in athletics are long overdue. The pain of what that means to the male dominated sports factories is the punishment imposed by society (or the courts) for

keeping the world's majority sex out of the locker rooms and off of the playing fields. We need to get over it and learn to co-exist or perish. I'll cover co-existing here in a minute.

Fighting this shift in paradigms is useless and non-productive. The ladies train is moving and we had better get on board or out of its way or we will get run over. Our battles, if wrestling is smart enough to open their eyes, is with the other male Olympic sports. In the next couple of years there will be roughly half as many men's teams as there are now. Like it or not, that's fact and anyone who can't see that is clearly without sight.

The leadership of our sport has no business fighting women and a cause that's just, in court or out. All that achieves is the creation of delusional expectations for wrestling's future while draining precious resources from limited assets. We simply can't afford to squander what has taken us decades to cultivate. Not to mention wasting hundred's of quality man-hours in a futile attempt at victory.

Instead of attacking the women's movement wrestling should be trying to

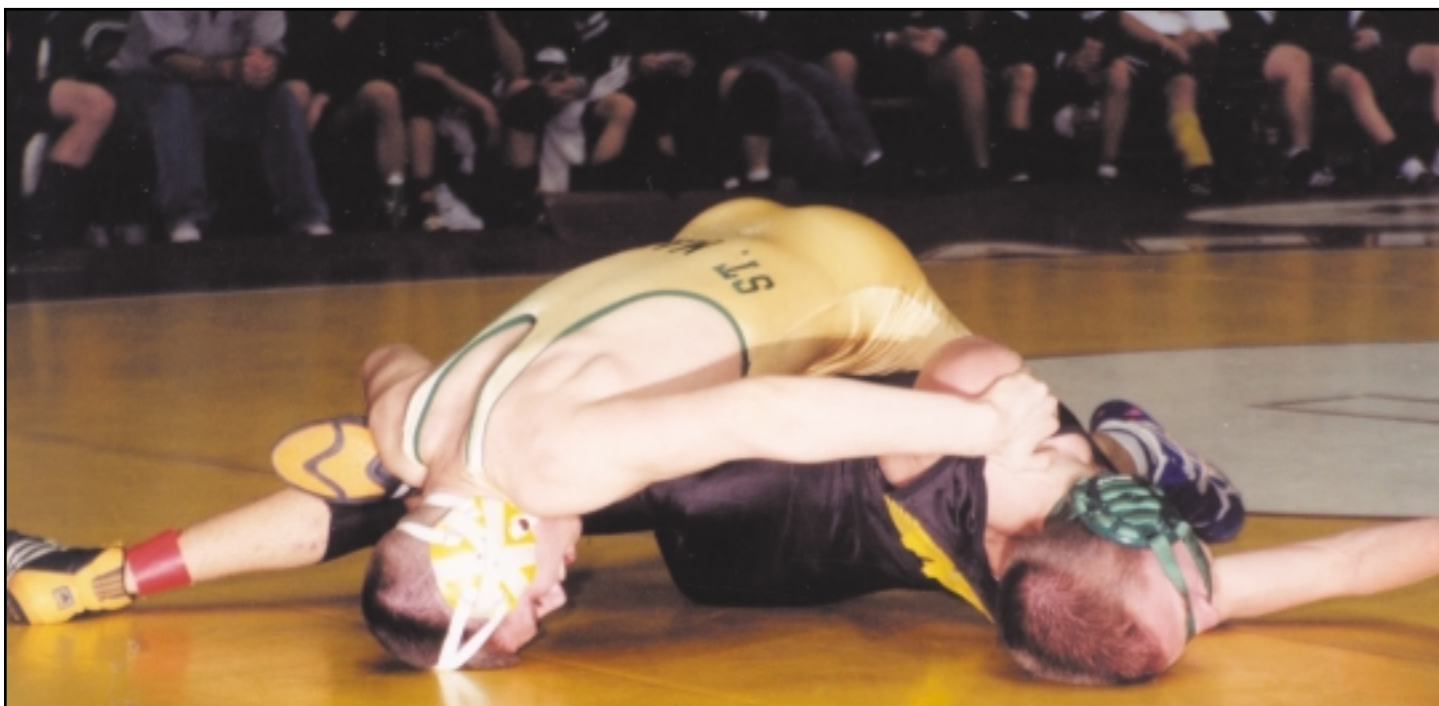
outlast, out produce and out politicize all the other non-revenue male sports.

The entire collegiate system as we know it is moving away from offering large numbers of male sports to half as many. The only question on the horizon for wrestling is will it be one of the survivors?

That's the damned-if-we-don't." We're damned-if-we-don't understand what is coming our way, damned-if-we-don't see the big picture, damned-if-we-don't start positioning ourselves as being the ones deserving of survival.

Right now we're whining and sniffing and refusing to see the obvious. The National Wrestling Coaching Association (NWCA) is simply not in touch with wrestling's largest challenge. They are enabling America's wrestling coaches by not stepping to the plate and saying what needs to be said . . . that wrestling programs disappear not because of Title IX, but due to the fact that coaches fail to do the job they don't know they have been hired to do. They simply haven't read the unwritten job descriptions for their positions. They are out of touch and the NWCA must bite the bullet here and edu-

145 lb. Joe Ferrara, St. Mark's, Wilmington, Delaware, (gold), won 5-4 over John Byrone, William Floyd High School, Long Island, New York. Photo by Kenny Correll.



cate them by saying the unpopular.

They must inform them that they have been hired to graduate athletes, not just field teams.

They need to know that a majority of their roster must hail from the state where their institution is located.

They must demonstrate that their athletes, by their actions, understand civic responsibility and are a noticeable asset to the community.

That wrestling is expected to increase the overall academic average of the entire athletic department which endears the sport to the administration.

That the coach and his staff are expected to fund raise and find ways to generate revenue for the entire athletic department.

That the term Athletic Director means "teammate" and not "a member of the opposition."

Coaches just don't get it and the NWCA isn't explaining it to them. Why is this a difficult mystery? Sure it's tough telling the emperor he has no clothes but by not saying the uncomfortable and obvious, the NWCA is allowing the emperor to meet with Brutus. Wrestling's leadership owes the sport more than it's giving.

As to damned-if-you-do, wrestling has, from day one, embraced a women's division of the sport. Because it was the right thing to do. Or was it?

With less than 1% of the total number of wrestlers competing, women have lobbied and have been successful in working their way onto the international stage. And from there into the Olympics in Athens. Good for them, it's about time. Or is it?

It appears the International Olympic Committee (IOC) is feeling the same pressures as the NCAA to get spiraling costs in hand while re-evaluating the size and proportionality issues of their programming. The result of this has been a reduction in the number of weight classes in wrestling from 20 in Atlanta, to 16 in Sydney, to 14 in Athens.

But the cuts go much deeper. By 2008, the rumor here in the United States is Greco-Roman is being cut from the Games all together. Citing minimal public interest and nonexistent media coverage, the IOC Program Committee has recommended they keep two wrestling programs, one for the women and one for the men. So, the women are in and one of two men's teams is out.

Equity? Sounds like it. Probably is. But damned-if-they-do and damned-if-they-don't. Politically, had the NWCA been smart, assuming survival is the name of the game, they would have embraced Title IX. They would have spent their resources educating coaches how to position their programs to survive in this dog

eat dog world and kept wrestling strictly as a men's-only sport.

Do I believe women should be allowed to wrestle, absolutely! I'm excited about their participation in the sport. It's exciting. But I'm more amazed that no one saw this coming, or if they did, they closed their eyes instead of positioning themselves for success.

Equally as amazing to me is the sureness of our leaders that Greco-Roman will be the discipline that is eliminated starting with the Games in Beijing. That is what I'm hearing and reading anyway in the media. But are we so convinced or limited or arrogant to automatically think that Greco-Roman is the one going out and Freestyle is staying?

The IOC Program Committee recommended the elimination of ONE of wrestling's two disciplines by 2008, they never mentioned Greco-Roman by name. That makes me shake my head. What are we thinking? This is the very thing that takes place in Washington D.C. everyday of the year. If one party needs to cut a program in Medicare for budgetary reasons, they mention 5 possible candidates for elimination. They really don't care which one goes, they just sit back and wait until the smoke clears and the one that receives

the least support is the one that goes.

Why do we think that Greco-Roman is the automatic choice . . . because we do better in Freestyle? Get a grip people. That may be the exact reason why FILA (the world governing body for wrestling) might look to eliminate Freestyle. Question, where is the political center of power in FILA? Answer, the European countries. And what style might one guess is the most successful in Europe given medal production? If you said Freestyle you'd be wrong. Seventy percent (70%) of all Olympic medals in Greco-Roman since 1968 have come out of Europe. In Sydney, only thirteen (13%) percent won freestyle medals.

Do I know something that USA Wrestling doesn't know. Nope. But I would think we might want to consider lobbying long and hard for Freestyle if that is the discipline we want in the Games. And I wouldn't necessarily take the word of the European leaders that Greco-Roman is the sport on its way out. That is exactly what I'd tell you too if I didn't want you to interfere with my plans.

So, damned-if-we-do and I'll be damned if I won't catch it for writing this ...but sometimes saying the unpopular is the way I see it! 🐕



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