



2000 WRESTLING MAN OF THE YEAR

J ROBINSON

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA, MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

J Robinson is a man who knows the direction he is headed. When he was named the head wrestling coach for the University of Minnesota in 1986, he was quoted as saying, "You need to instill confidence into your wrestlers. Their goals should be to be national champions. That has to be a constant dream or you will never get there." Robinson continued, "Here at Minnesota, we will have to decide where our wrestling program is going. It will be my job to get our wrestlers on that train, and they will need to realize whether they are going to be on that train or not, that train is a moving!" Robinson has kept that train moving for 14 years, not only in Minnesota but throughout the nation. In his first season the Gophers did not win a Big Ten dual and in 1991-92 the team finished 8-14. Those seasons have since become the only two with less wins than losses. Robinson has guided his teams to four top three finishes in the last four seasons and appears to be picking up steam. He has coached 26 different wrestlers who have earned 46 All-American honors, including a school record six All-Americans in each of the past three seasons. He has been named Big Ten Coach of the Year four times, most recently in 1999. He continues to attract some of the top recruits in the nation.

To his credit, he has not only encouraged wrestlers to enjoy the ride, but fans as well. The Gopher Takedown Club really took off a couple of years after Robinson's first season and has continued to grow each year. The Takedown Club, a social organization has been instrumental in organizing parents and fans as they follow and support their Golden Gophers. The annual Verne Gagne Golf and Tennis Classic, the Big Ten Conference Tournament and NCAA Championships, as well as regular dual meets, have given wrestling enthusiasts plenty of opportunities to be a part of the world's oldest sport at the University of Minnesota. The Minnesota High School Christmas Tournament and the Wrestling Mall website are two more examples of Robinson's influence. He emphasized, "A lot of people contribute to all these programs. More people are involved than just me."

Just as Robinson was encouraged to try wrestling at Mount Miguel High School in Spring Valley, California, back in the early 60's, he has continued to encourage and influence wrestlers and coaches to 'conceive, believe and achieve'. His camps and clinics have, for many years, been among the best in the country.

The Minnesota Wrestling Weekly, an idea originated by Robinson, to put amateur wrestling on T.V., started in 1997. The first of its kind in the nation, it is an exciting fast-paced half hour show featuring high school, college, kids, and Olympic wrestling. The purpose of the show is to create more interest in the sport of wrestling and to encourage

other states to start their own wrestling show.

Last year, Robinson again stepped into the national arena, this time with a political agenda. He has been talking locally about Title IX and its negative effect on wrestling for several years. Robinson created Simply Common Sense (SCS) as a way to help educate people about what proportionality has done and is still doing to amateur wrestling. As explained on The Wrestling Mail website, "SCS is not against Title IX. SCS is an organization created by a small group of individuals with a big dream. That dream was to challenge and rectify the injustice and cease the negative consequences of proportionality".

Robinson not only preaches 'conceive, believe and achieve', but he lives it on and off the mat. He has applied that theory to Simply Common Sense as he has thrust himself into the front line of battle.

When I asked Robinson what he envisioned for the sport of college wrestling in the next 15 or so years he responded; "Well, I envision it growing. Here again the reason I started this thing [SCS]; nobody's real mission is to promote college wrestling, although wrestling is growing at every level throughout the United States. So for me, it's to develop an organization that wrestling people pay for; to promote college wrestling and educate the public of all the benefits of wrestling. And I think if you do that, parents are looking for a place to put their kids to learn life lessons, and there is no better place than wrestling." He continued, "I think if we can get an organized, concerted effort and have some vision of where we want to be, we then go into

every state and say 'OK' in the next year we're going to pick a school [and] we're going to go after it and get college wrestling put back in and methodically bring it back just the way it was taken away from us."

J Robinson has the experience to carry on this fight. He was a Ranger in the U.S. Army. He has been an Olympic wrestler and coach. He was an assistant at the University of Iowa, and now the head coach at the University of Minnesota.

J Robinson has assembled a coaching staff at the University second to none. He has given credit to those people willing to have a dream and work for it. He has challenged and motivated wrestlers, coaches, fans and officials to step up and be counted.

J Robinson is "The Man of the Year" on a train ride and there are no signs of it slowing down or stopping anytime soon.

Nominated by Jim Beshey, Editor of *The Guillotine*
Minnesota's Amateur Wrestling Newspaper.

