

## WRESTLING

### *Cliques, Humor, Humility and Mat Sport Issues*

By Bill Welker, EdD

I began wrestling as a third grader in 1955. The sport prepared me for the “ups and downs” of adult living. After competing, I coached it, officiated it, wrote about it, and promoted wrestling whenever I had the opportunity. With that being said, allow me to share with you some things that have humored me, humbled me, and others that have concerned me.

#### COACHING AWARD CLIQUE #1

I have attended tons of coaching awards ceremonies in wrestling and other sports banquets over the years. After receiving their plaques, the coaches’ favorite clique has always been: *“I am so humbled for being honored with this award.”*

Since levity is a part of my social make-up, I wonder if some of them were really thinking: *“It’s about time the ‘selection committee’ recognized me. It should have happened ten years ago.”*

Now let me tell you about being truly humbled. The season after I won Pennsylvania states in 1963 for Shamokin High School, our wrestling team had an easy dual meet. My opponent was a virtual nobody in the sport. Having fun with him while riding, I stretched my head over his back. He put me in a reverse cradle and pinned me.

Walking back to the team bench, my coach muttered, *“Get away from me.”*

I spent the rest of the dual meet with my tail between my legs. But it got even worse. The headlines in all the local newspapers read: *“STATE CHAMPION WELKER GETS PINNED BY...”*

Even today, my so-called friends continue to bring it up.

Shakespeare is quoted as saying, *“The evil that men do lives after them; the good is off interred with their bones.”* He surely hit the nail on the head, and I can still feel the lump. It’s a humbling experience that has lasted a lifetime.

#### COACHING AWARD CLIQUE #2

The second coaching award clique that is so often proclaimed: *“I wanted to give back to the sport that has given me so much.”*

*“Give back!”*

Every night after doing my homework and lifting weights during wrestling season, I went running five miles in leather dress shoes. Running shoes did not exist back then. And when it was snowing, I put rubber galoshes over my shoes and ran in the snow. One evening, I was even stopped by a state police officer and driven home. I forgot to put on light-colored running attire.

After intense wrestling workouts at practice, many of my teammates and I would then get under woolen blankets and lay down by the boiler room for an hour to continue sweating to lose more weight.

During that time period, there were no nutritious diet plans available for wrestlers, so we lost weight by any unsavory way we could. We didn’t know any better.

Furthermore, the Christmas Holidays were less than cheerful. While we were practically starving to keep our weight down, our friends were enjoying festive foods and treats.

Oh, yes. Dedicated wrestlers have already “given back” every day at and after practice throughout their entire competitive careers.

## **WRESTLING’S ISSUES**

Why is wrestling its own worst enemy? The answer is quite simple; we’re always changing the rules. I experienced it first-hand decades ago. Consider the following.

When I competed in high school, we lived by the NCAA Wrestling Rule Book. My senior year, they ruled that after the first two-point takedown, every other takedown was one point. The rules committee was upset with one university whose wrestlers were taking their opponents down, letting them up, taking them down, again and again, not working for a fall.

Now a takedown is worth three match-points. So, what are the wrestlers doing – taking them down, letting them up, taking them down, over and over, not working for a fall.

Go figure.

And if you’re trying to recruit new fans, forget the international styles of wrestling. The rules are very confusing. In Freestyle wrestling, match points are flying all over the place. What for? Furthermore, sometimes the winner is later declared the loser by appeal. Why?

In reference to Greco-Roman wrestling, the only word I can think of is “Boring”.

Thank goodness for the popularity of girls’ wrestling. It has revitalized interest in the mat sport.

## **Concluding Remarks**

As for myself, I thank God for giving me the physical tools to be able to wrestle, especially after watching the courage and fight of those little ones at St. Jude and Shriner Hospitals. I also thank God for all his blessings and Jesus for his forgiveness.

In closing, I think John Wooden said it best:

**NATURAL TALENT IS GOD-GIVEN; BE HUMBLE,  
FAME IS MAN-GIVEN; BE GRATEFUL,  
CONCEIT IS SELF-GIVEN; BE CAREFUL.**

About the author: *Bill Welker, EdD, served as the West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission Wrestling Rules Interpreter, Clinician, and Supervisor of State Tournament Officials for 28 years (1989 – 2017). Bill Welker was also a member of the National Federation of State High School Associations Wrestling Rules Committee from 2012 until 2015.*

*Bill and his brother Floyd (1959 State Champion) were the first brother-team to win states in District Four from Shamokin, PA. Their cousin Harold Welker won states in 1938, the inaugural year of the elite competition held at Penn State’s Rec Hall. Tom Elling has dubbed the Welkers as the “Oldest Family of Pennsylvania State Champions” in his final Pennsylvania Wrestling Handbook.*

*For his contributions to wrestling, Bill Welker has been inducted into five wrestling halls of fame, including the District Four Wrestling Hall of Fame (2000), National Wrestling Hall of Fame - West Virginia Chapter (2008) and the Pennsylvania Wrestling Hall of Fame (2010). He welcomes and will respond to all reader opinions, pro or con, by contacting him at mattalkwv@hotmail.com).*