

Columbia 100th Year Anniversary

By Rachel Hitchcock

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Few historians know how collegiate wrestling originated, and most of them would be pressed to come up with a year that would trace the roots of this ancient sport. Columbia University has been blessed with both, and is proud to be the first school to host an intercollegiate wrestling meet.

One hundred years ago, two of the oldest universities in the nation originated collegiate wrestling when the Yale News published an offer sent by Columbia University in February of 1903. The notice was addressed to Yale University and the challenger, Columbia, offered a gold medal to the winner of a wrestling competition between teams of four students from each school. The dual meet was to take place prior to a basketball game hosted by Columbia. Yale accepted the challenge and the teams agreed to meet twice in March, once on each campus. A victory would go to the team that won two out of three falls in each of the four weight classes.

While Columbia had sent the challenge, it did not yet have a team. Once Yale accepted, Thomas Wood, the first director of the wrestling program, organized a group to start practicing in the gym. On February 27, 1903, the first group began wrestling practice, under the tutelage of a local New York wrestling guru, Gustav

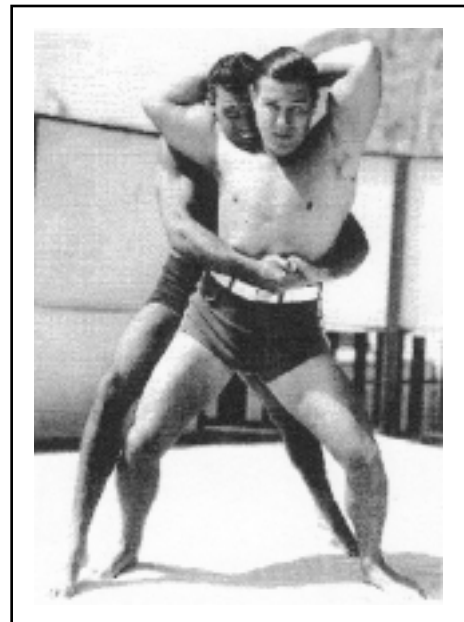
Bojus, and Director Wood. Four representatives were selected for the Yale/Columbia match on March 19; Yale simply used its four intramural wrestling champions.

The meet took place on March 21 with Hugh Leonard of the NYAC acting as the referee. People attending the meet were required to pay an admission fee of 25 cents. Yale won two of the four weight classes, and forfeited one weight class to Columbia; Columbia took one bout, leaving the final score in a 2-2 tie.

The next day, the Yale team met to elect its first team captain, for the following week's meet. On March 28, Yale hosted the second collegiate wrestling dual meet. Yale gained a draw at the lightest weight, won two other bouts and forfeited the heavy-weight division to Columbia. Yale claimed the dual meet victory, the first intercollegiate win by a wrestling team. The season ended with Yale at 1-0-1 and Columbia at 0-1-1.

Neither school competed in 1904, but met twice again in 1905. The Lions again tied Yale, 3-3, on February 18, and lost to the Bulldogs on March 6 in New York, 4-2.

In the 1905 season, the Intercollegiate Wrestling Association was formed by students, with the meet at Penn serving as its first championship. Now called the Eastern Intercollegiate Wrestling Association



(EIWA), this organization sponsors the oldest intercollegiate wrestling event in the nation. On March 22, Penn hosted the first Intercollegiate Wrestling Association tournament, with four schools in attendance. Yale placed first, Columbia placed second, followed by Princeton and Pennsylvania. This storied history is one of the reasons that the EIWA is known as being one of the most respected conferences in the nation, even today.

The Light Blue won its first match in 1905, 4-3 over Penn. Now the nation's oldest intercollegiate wrestling school (since Yale discontinued the sport in 1991), Columbia has competed in every IWA and EIWA championship tournament, hosting it six times and taking second four times. The Lions' early competitors included the aforementioned Ivy League schools, the Harlem YMCA and the St. George Club; Penn State, Lehigh, Lafayette, Navy and the New York Athletic Club soon became opponents for the new Columbia wrestling program, between 1911 and 1914.

Nathaniel Greene "Nat" Pendleton was the first Columbia wrestler who became known for his talent on the mat in the EIWA. He won back-to-back EIWA titles in 1914 and 1915. After he graduated from CU in 1916, Pendleton won the National AAU Wrestling Championship, representing the New York Athletic Club. On the national level, Pendleton was the



most successful wrestler in the history of the school. He brought home a silver medal from the 1920 Olympic Games in Antwerp, Belgium.

Gus Peterson became the school's first full-time wrestling coach in 1915 while Pendleton was still at the university. He would go on to coach the Light Blue for over 30 years. During his tenure as head coach, 35 wrestlers were EIWA place-winners.

Peterson's successor, Dick Waite, coached for 12 years, and had the privilege of working with some of Columbia's most successful wrestlers, including 1951 All-American and EIWA runner-up at 137, Bob Hartman.

After Waite's retirement in 1960, Stan Thornton took over the reins of the Lions' wrestling program. Thornton will forever be known as the man who guided the program to a 6-0 Ivy League record and Columbia's first Ivy League championship in 1961.

Thornton was succeeded by Jerry Seckler in 1968, who most notably brought in top recruits from Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Long Island, all areas known for talent.

Ron Russo replaced Seckler at the helm of the Lions' wrestling program, in 1973. Among the athletes under his tute-



lage were two more of Columbia's All-American selections, Jerry Reid (1978) and Dave Galdi (1982).

Lou Montano was the sixth full-time head coach to take over the reins of the Lions' wrestling in 1991. In nine years time, Montano's efforts produced Columbia's two highest point totals in the EIWA Championships, three of its best recent finishes and its first ever ranking in the nation's Top 50.

Leading the Columbia Lions' charge into the 21st century is Brendan Buckley, Columbia's seventh wrestling coach. In only his third season, the Lions have entered a new realm. Buckley has recruited talent across the country's wrestling hotbeds, spanning New Jersey to

California. Among his recruits who are on this season's team is first-year phenom Matt Palmer, who has begun his collegiate career with two tournament titles, an Outstanding Wrestler nod, an EIWA Co-Wrestler of the Week honor and is 16-1 this season.

Dating back to the ancient times, wrestling has long held the interest of athletes and sports fans alike. From its purest form on the lawn of Columbia University in 1903 to a national championship meet in New York, wrestling remains in the blood of those whom it captures.

Written by Rachel Hitchcock, using information compiled and contributed by Don Sayenga and Bill Steinman.



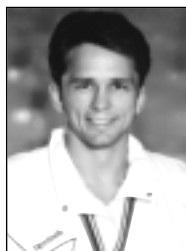
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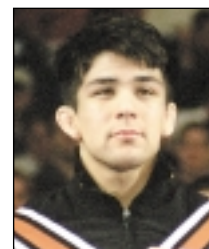
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